

12 Days of DNF-mas

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12 Days of DNF-mas

by [passmethemolly](#)

Summary

Counting down the days until Christmas with Dream and George!

Taking place a year after Chasing Snowflakes, George and Dream are back in England and spending another few weeks together in the spirit of the holidays. 12 days, 12 different adventures.

Notes

i didn't do the christmas fluff justice in the first book, so now that its actually the season, imma bring it ON
(please check ending note :D)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

First Day

George frowned at his phone as Dream's voicemail plays, hanging up before he could leave yet *another* message for him. The number of times George has called him in the past two hours was embarrassing- five calls every ten minutes and no response for any, but he was starting to become worried. Dream was usually good with keeping up their quick daily phone calls.

"No luck?" Erin says, leaning across the kitchen counter to her cousin. George shakes his head and turns his phone off. It was late in the afternoon and George was losing hope that his boyfriend would call him back.

"Maybe his phone died?" George's mom says as she tears cinnamon filled dough into small pieces.

"Or maybe you did something to make him mad?" Steven adds (unhelpfully), helping Rose place the cinnamon roll dough on the pan.

George sighs. Just last year, they were sitting at this counter together and decorating cookies, making the kitchen look like JoJo Siwa threw up all over the place. Then they had this plan that Dream was going to come back for the holidays, but he had to cancel on George because of 'family stuff.' George didn't care that Dream couldn't come; he just wanted his daily phone call. Then again, Dream *did* say he would tell his parents about him and George, so maybe he wouldn't be in the right headspace for a phone call.

Now I'm worried again...great, George thought as he pulled up Dream's contact again.

"George!" Erin cries, snatching the phone from him. "Drop it! He'll call you back eventually, Jesus. Leave the guy alone."

George grabs his phone back. "Whatever," he mumbles. He wanted to fight back, but his heart wasn't into it.

"Hello!" A voice calls from the hall and Aunt Lilly peers her head in, black hair wet from melting snow. "We're here! Is George-"

"George is here and we're making cinnamon rolls!" Rose exclaims, turning to show the pan of lumpy dough. As Erin gives Lilly a pointed look, George snorts, since she was telling his aunt to smile and nod at the excuse for a Christmas pastry.

"...That's great!" Uncle Ben says after a long beat of silence. "Should we go get Dr-"

"Dressed in your baking clothes? Absolutely! Come join us," Steven finishes. He wipes his sticky hands on a paper towel to shake Ben's, and the two share a silent conversation.

"What is happening right now?" George said and Erin shrugs, popping chocolate chips in her mouth.

Aunt Lily turns to him. "Have you spoken to Dream at all?"

"Oh God," Erin mutters as George shakes his head, mood plummeting down again.

"I've tried calling, but he hasn't been picking up."

“Huh. Odd. Not like the fellow to do that,” Aunt Lily says. George shrugs. *Yeah, he doesn't do that. That's why I'm kind of worried here.*

Erin nudges George's phone to him. “I'm allowing you one more call.”

“Why?”

“I know you want to and you're killing the Christmas mood. And don't even fucking try to make this hard because I *will* call him myself, and we both know that's not a joke,” Erin threatens him. After a moment of staring at his black phone screen, everyone staring at him, he gives in to the peer pressure, and he redials Dream.

The phone rings and rings and rings and the sound was taunting him. “This is so stupid,” George said, “He's not going to pick up-”

“Hello?” Dream says through the phone and he freezes, mouth slightly open, and he turns to Erin, who had a faint grin on her face. “Helloooo? George?”

“Why didn't you pick up?” He blurts. Erin's grin falls before mouthing the word ‘*smooth*.’

“Pretty sure I did?”

“I meant like...before. The other calls.”

“Oh,” Dream says simply and George can hear the faint sound of wind on the other end. “I dunno. Why did you spam my phone?”

“Did I? Where are you?”

“I'm everywhere, George,” Dream jokes, “and yes, you did. I have, like, a hundred missed calls from you.”

“Okay, but seriously. Why didn't you pick up? Where are you right now?”

Dream lets out a long sigh and he hesitates before saying, “I wanted to say it face to face.”

“Say what?”

“Look outside.”

George's heart raced in his chest as his eyes flick up to his family, who all became *very* interested in the lumpy cinnamon rolls, and he kept the phone to his ear as he slowly stands from his seat, keeping an eye on Erin. She doesn't look at him. She doesn't even acknowledge that he left the kitchen- she just kept fixing an already fixed roll. *Weird.*

But George walks slowly to the front door and to the large window that looked out over his front yard. The winter sky was purple and the piling snow outside looked pale blue, silvered tree branches reaching to the sky as George gazed out. He didn't see anything weird.

“What? There's nothing there,” he said and Dream laughs lightly like he was holding back from being loud.

“Trust me. Open the door, George.”

George looks down at the handle. He almost didn't want to. “How?”

“What?! What do you mean how?!” Dream says and George cringes.

“Wait, that’s not what I meant-”

“You put your hand on the handle, and you pull, Georgie.”

George places a slow hand on the door and takes a silent deep breath before slowly pulling it open, and as fading light bleeds into the hallway, so does Dream’s shadow. George lifts his gaze to his boyfriend’s shining eyes and his heart goes feral in his ribcage. Dream has a cocky grin on his face with a silver phone against his ear, bundled in a hoodie and white beanie. He looked good. He looked *h appy*.

“Don’t... don’t call me that,” George whispers in the phone before hanging up and throwing his arms around Dream’s neck, yanking him down. He smelled like pine and snow and airport, but he felt so real in his arms. Warm and comforting, just like he remembered. Dream pulls George closer and buries his freezing nose into his neck so he could feel Dream’s wide grin on his skin.

"I was wondering when you were gonna let me in," Dream mutters and it gives George goosebumps, "it's freezing out here."

George giggles and pulls away to see Dream’s face that was pink from the cold, snowflakes melting on his cheeks as they fall on the boys. It didn’t take Dream long to lean down and press a long kiss against George, sparks flying down from his lips to his stomach as it reminds him how much he *missed* Dream. Dream grins as George kisses back harder, dragging warm hands up his neck and to his face. His boyfriend's lips were freezing, but it felt so refreshing. George felt completely, utterly alive.

“Airplane mode is a bitch, isn’t it?” Dream says to George.

“I thought you weren’t coming?”

“Of course I was coming, don’t be an idiot. I would never, ever pass up an opportunity to bully you with Erin.”

George’s face falls. “Okay, you can go back to Florida now,” he says and he pulls away from him, shoving his hand against Dream's cheek in fake disgust, and Dream laughs. Like actually laughs- a sound George hasn’t heard in real life since he went to Florida at the beginning of the year when he and Dream left England together.

“No, no, no! C’mon now, I was kidding,” Dream laughs. He grabs George’s waist and pulls him to his chest again, and although George wanted to stick to the bit, he let himself be held by his boyfriend, drowning in the warmth that was in his chest despite the biting cold around them.

“Are you love birds coming in? You’re letting all the heat out,” Erin says behind them, one hand ready to lock the boys out on the front porch.

After a few greetings, Dream takes a seat next to George at the counter, and he was going crazy with the cinnamon roll icing on his pastry. George tried his best to be careful because he knew there was a science to getting his cinnamon roll perfect, and he wanted to outshine Dream in decorating this year. Despite Dream’s crazy method, a calm conversation carried out in hushed tones between him and his roll maniac.

“I called your mom and told her I wanted to surprise you, and she wasted no time calling your aunt and stuff,” Dream explains, throwing chocolate chips down. Only five stuck to the thick layer of icing while the rest rolled around the plate, and George sighed at him. He wasn’t very good at

decorating, so he probably had a chance here.

“And what? I just never found out?”

“Yeah, that’s kinda how a surprise works, Georgie.”

George points his tube of frosting at him. “I said don’t call me that.”

“Oh, and what? You’re gonna start a fight again?”

“Yeah. I will.”

“Well, I guess having red icing on a cinnamon roll will be the next big thing, huh?” Dream said and George looks at the frosting in his hands, squinting at it. *Is it red?*

“Erin, is this red?” He asks, turning to his cousin. Her cinnamon roll was bare with a few melting marshmallows on top. She doesn’t look up from her work of art, but George can see the evil grin spreading on her face. “Nevermind, I’m not asking you.”

“It’s not red,” Steven says and George lets out a breath of relief. “It’s green.”

“What?!” George cries and Dream bursts out laughing, a palm covering his eyes. His perfect cinnamon roll. Ruined. So much for those Snapchat pictures he promised Sapnap and Quackity.

“It’s white, it’s white. I promise,” Dream says and then George felt dumb because he can see white just fine. But, he’ll take the pass from being called out and he whacks his boyfriend with the plastic tube.

“So it looks good?” George asks when he carefully places a caramel drop right in the center. Dream leans against his shoulder and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Looks great,” he said. Then he takes his...green? Red?...tube of frosting and adds a small smiley face at the top, not getting a single line smooth and straight. George watches in horror as it goes from picture-perfect to whatever level Dream’s roll was on. “But now it looks even greater.”

“ *Please* go back to Florida.”

“Not a chance!” Dream digs a finger into George's ribs and George shies away from it, fighting laughter.

“Hey, look at that,” Erin says and she points her finger to George’s ruined cinnamon roll. “It actually looks good now.”

George rolled his eyes as everyone laughs, but he didn’t care. He buried his head into the crook of Dream’s neck and watched his boyfriend draw broken lines on the pastry like he was trying to summon a demon or something, and George decided that he preferred his roll ruined. He liked seeing Dream’s own little stamp on it. It reminded George that in everything he did, Dream would always be there for him.

When Dream finishes, too busy babbling to George’s parents about some crazy storm hitting Florida when he was at the airport, his hand snakes down to find George’s under the table. He locks their fingers together, rubbing soothing circles in the back of George’s hand, and George closes his eyes. Like the Grinch, his heart was swelling and he finally felt excited for Christmas.

“Oh- Merry early Christmas, George,” Dream whispers to him when there’s a pauses in the

conversation. George snuggles closer to him.

“Merry early Christmas, Dream.”

Second Day

This was the first time that George didn't want to be on a team with Dream. His boyfriend was usually the jack of all trades- good at anything whenever he needed to be, but holy crap, it's like Dream lost all his motor skills when it came to decorating.

This year, Aunt Lily suggested adding a 'little more spice' into the season by starting a gingerbread house building competition. Four teams: Steven and Rose, Uncle Ben and Aunt Lily, Erin and the twins, and George and Dream. One counter: the kitchen counter, duh, and a whole lot of candies and bowls of frosting scattered around them. George glances behind him at Dream's drowned-in-icing cinnamon roll as he tears the gumdrops out of his hungry boyfriend's hands. Yeah, they were fucked.

"I still don't know why *I* got stuck with the twins this year," Erin grumbles as Jack reaches over the counter for a candy cane, bumping the fragile wall of the house and knocking it down.

"Because," Aunt Lily says quietly as she carefully places a roof down, "you're way too creative and the twins will level the playing field."

Erin cringes as Mary takes a bite out of their roof. "It's like working with two mini Godzillas."

"At least your teammates are *helping*," George says. He slaps Dream's hand away from the stray gumdrop next to the house. George was trying desperately to glue the cookie walls together with the cheap icing.

"I am helping!" Dream exclaims and he, quite the opposite of being helpful, moves a wall and they come tumbling down. George has to put his head down for a second.

"You suck at this," George whispers to him. Dream laughs and George can see yellow in his mouth, making him jab a finger into Dream's ribs. "Stop. Eating. The. Decor!"

"Awight! Awight, just 'ell me wha to do," he says, chewing obnoxiously in George's face and he hates that he fucking laughed at that.

"Hold the walls up and don't let go until I say so."

George was far from an artistic guy. Erin seemed to hog all of those genes as she manages to get Mary to follow her colorful pattern of candy on the roof, and George looks at their half-built house, sighing. The once cold icing was defrosting in his grip as he rebuilds the house. He ducks under Dream's arm to reach the other side and as soon as George gently pulls at his boyfriend's wrists to make him slowly let go, Dream lays an arm over his shoulders and keeps George leaning against his chest.

"Better?" Dream asks. George looks at the slowly sliding walls.

He smiles. "Better."

"Told you I could help!" Dream says and he kisses the top of George's head as he sits back up. "What's your plan here? What's the theme?"

"...Theme?" George asks.

"Yeah, you know- we going for a *Candy Land* thing or something basic?"

George doesn't even answer because one wall finally collapses into the hollow house, the rest of the walls and roof somehow staying strong, and George gives up. He groans loudly and shoves the tube of frosting in Dream's hands, completely over this stupid competition. Might as well have the chaotic decorator take the wheel.

Aunt Lily and Uncle Ben's house looked fluffy with marshmallows and cotton candy along their roof, while his mom and dad took a subtle approach, using small dabs of icing to hold everything together for a seamless look. And Erin's- god, it looked like something right out of a Christmas catalog. And that was *with* the half-eaten roof. George's eyes watch Dream's hands work shockingly carefully, making small snow piles around the destroyed house.

"What are you doing?" George asks. He puts a gumdrop in his mouth. *If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.*

"You'll see."

"It better be--"

"You'll see, Georgie," Dream cuts him off. Everyone falls silent as they focus on decorating, the teams conversing quietly with each other as one person hands the supplies and the other places them strategically on the home.

"Why are we even making these? We don't even get to eat them," George said. Uncle Ben looks up at him from under his beanie and brown beard dotted with icing.

"Oy, George, might as well say '*Bahumbug*,' " he responds. "You're letting your boyfriend do all the work. I haven't seen you even touch the bastard."

"I- what?! I literally made the stupid house stand!" George cries.

"Half-stand," Dream corrects him under his breath, and everyone chuckles, watching the roof slide off. *Great. Fan-fucking-tastic.*

George slides down in his seat. "I'm not doing this anymore."

Eventually, after Dream taps him with the bowl of gumdrops enough times, George gives in and starts placing them in the collapsed home filled with the rest of their icing. George didn't question it. At this point, Dream's ideas would be better than his attempts to make a decent looking home. His aunt's phone chimes off from her timer and Dream flips the bowl in George's hands and dumps it on top of the monster they created. Okay, maybe neither were the best decorators.

"Spin them!" Aunt Lily says and everyone, very carefully and slowly (except for George and Dream), spins their houses to face each other. Rose blinks at George and then her eyes flick up to Dream, her mouth hanging open at slight astonishment.

"Dream, what is...that?" She asks.

"What even was your thought process? If there was one," Erin comments. Mary pokes her head up over the counter and swipes at a pile of frosting dripping down on their house. George gives her a disgusted look.

"Well, when George destroyed it--"

"I did not, shut up!"

“- I was inspired by Florida hurricanes, and yeah. It’s just a destroyed home,” Dream explained to the confused audience and Erin snorts.

“It doesn’t even look like a house, Dream,” George sighs. So much for that hyped-up ‘you’ll see.’

“We already know we lost George. Just accept it,” Dream says.

George slams a palm into the counter. “I thought you were going to be more competitive!”

“George, it’s a cookie house-”

“No, it’s not just that! We let *children* beat us!” Erin gives George a look.

“You’re so dumb! Look-” Dream says, smiling. He scoops up a chunk of frosting on his finger and plops it down on the tip of George’s nose. “C’mon, now. You can’t be angry with frosting on your nose.”

“I’m not angry,” George grumps, but his cheeks were warm with a small blush.

“It’s working! Hallelujah!” Dream cries dramatically and George giggles as his boyfriend shakes his shoulders back and forth. George swipes frosting across Dream’s cheek in retaliation.

Dream was a lot happier lately. Both with himself and in general. This morning, George woke up wrapped tightly in his arms with Dream’s forehead pressed against the back of his neck, legs tangled together like his boyfriend was scared George was going to get up and walk away in the middle of the night. Then he seemed to be a lot more comfortable with showing George affection around his family, which was nice. Really nice. George fought hard to have this and he knew Dream was fighting even harder.

As everyone else starts arguing about who the winner is, Aunt Lily and Erin getting into a heated argument and there was something about cheating being thrown in there, George breaks off a piece of gingerbread wall and hands half of it to Dream, snuggling into his side.

“You’re the worst decorator ever,” George says.

“Don’t tell me you have a dream of being an architect,” Dream snorts, flicking the sad mess.

“Trust me, there’s not. Hey, did you do the thing?” George asks. Dream looks down at him as he chews slowly on the cookie.

“There’s a lot of things, George.”

“Your parents. Did you tell them?”

Dream’s eyes go dead for a second at the mention of them and George can see his thoughts race through them. Dream clenches his jaw. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, I did.”

“Did it go...okay...?”

“It went fine.”

“Are you sure-”

“Can we talk about it later? I don’t wanna kill the mood here,” Dream says and the light returns to his eyes as he gazes at George against him.

No, because now I'm going to be worried again, George thought as he smiled up at Dream, nodding. He'll definitely ask again.

"Thanks." Dream kisses the tip of George's nose, eating a bit of the frosting, and George knows this because as he pulls away, he can see white on his lips.

George rolls his eyes. "That's disgusting! You're so gross."

"Come on; you're all red!"

"You idiot! I'm embarrassed for you!"

"Too bad because I see some more right here-" Dream kisses the area between his eyebrows, "-and right here-" Another kiss on the corner of his eye, "-oh! And riiight here!" Dream draws out and he swoops down, giving George a light kiss on his lips that was enough to make him feel like he swallowed butterflies. *Okay, maybe I'll ask again. Tomorrow. The next day? I don't wanna kill the mood.*

"Good Lord, you two, if this stupid house doesn't give me a cavity, you guys will!" Aunt Lily says and George feels a gumdrop hit his temple. "Jesus, step out into the hall at least."

"Oh my God," George mutters, burying his face into his hands. Dream laughs next to him with an equally flushed face and they separate a bit, eyeing the twins that were too busy playing around with globs of frosting. George can see the gross look in his boyfriend's as he watched Jack lick his slobbery hands clean of frosting. George laughs at him.

Kids are gross. Not me, Dream mouthed to him.

It's about even, George mouthed back and Dream hits him in the side, making George shove his shoulder back in revenge.

"I just got whiplash to last year," Erin mutters to herself as she watches the boys swat each other and duck at blows. "One moment, they're kissing, and the next...they're beating each other's asses into next week."

"Stop it!" George screams as he swerves out of the way of Dream's arm, a huge smile breaking through. Rose bumps Erin's shoulder as she stands and gathers the candy scraps. She doesn't miss the warm, crazy grin on her son's face or the new light in Dream's eyes.

"Let them be," she says quietly. "They're finally happy."

Third Day

George's eyes flutter open and he gazes out at the dimly lit room, a hazy yellow morning as the sun streaks through the blinds on his window. It was early. Way too early for George, who slept like there was no tomorrow, to even function. He didn't know why he was awake.

George nestles his cheek back into his pillow, shutting his heavy eyes. "Dream, what time is it?" He slurs. No response. Usually, this would be normal, right? Dream was fast asleep next to him so, obviously, there would be no response, except that this was Dream and he was a light sleeper and always answered George's sleepy questions.

George kicks his foot to hit Dream's leg, but he doesn't feel anything. And that is when George's brain clicks the pieces together and he figures out why he woke up at the crack-ass of dawn. Dream wasn't lying next to him anymore. He was chilly without his boyfriend's unnaturally warm body against his.

"Dream?" George mutters as he sits up and he finds Dream sitting at the edge of his bed, staring down at his phone. Dream's fingers were flying across the keyboard before he turns to George, a small smile on his face as he looks at him.

"Did I wake you up?" He asks. George wraps his arms around himself.

"No. Why are you down there?"

Dream waves his phone. "Oh...you know...my sister was saying goodnight to me."

"Isn't it one a.m. there?" George asks, the math slowly working itself out.

"Y-yeah. She's a night owl," Dream said. George rubs his eyes and lays down on his back, body aching to snuggle back into the warmth of his bed and sleep until noon.

"Your hair looks terrible," Dream comments and George can feel him crawl over to him on the bed, the mattress dipping around him as Dream holds himself above George with hands on either side of his head. George opens one eye at him.

"I couldn't shower because you decided to hog all the hot water. In the middle of the fucking winter."

Dream chuckles, pressing their foreheads together. "What?! That's disgusting! Why wouldn't you-"

"Oh, please, you were the one licking frosting off of my face yesterday! You can't call me gross."

"At least I take care of my hygiene- you smell awful." Dream places a ghost kiss on George's neck.

George hums. "Whatever. You clearly don't care."

"Mm, I do. You smell like George." Another light kiss on his jaw.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You stink. Like B.O and frosting."

“Shut up, Dream. Let me sleep,” George says and he grins lazily as Dream presses his lips against the corner of his mouth. Not like a kiss- he just pressed a smile onto George’s skin to tell him that it was all just jokes. Dream moves from above George to shuffle back under the covers, automatically pulling George to him, and George quickly drifts back to sleep as Dream hums a semi-annoying cover of *Jingle Bells* into the back of George’s hair. He writes gibberish on George’s spine. *A guy could get used to this.*

When George wakes up again, Dream was gone from his side again and he was peeking through the blinds with a gold bar illuminating the light color in his eyes. A much better and more beautiful view to wake up to, and George felt even more awake as he pads over to him with his comforter wrapped around his shoulders.

“What is it?” George yawns, coming up next to him.

“It snowed a fuck-ton last night,” Dream says, “look at that! It’s like...it’s like Jack Frost threw up all over the place!”

George snorts at the gross metaphor. “It’s like this every year.”

“Duh, but like, in Florida, my dad would be wrapping lights around the palm tree in our front yard with a t-shirt on,” Dream says. George can see him smile at the memory before it turns sour, and he goes back to staring out at the shimmering snow. For scale on how much a ‘fuck-ton’ was, the snow was just brushing the bottom of the swings on the swing set, and they were at least two feet off of the ground. George was already getting tired again and his skin was pricking from the cold air slowly coming off the window, but Dream suddenly turned and grabbed his white beanie hanging on the knob of George’s desk.

“Where are you going?” George asks. Dream shrugs on his hoodie over his long sleeve shirt, a devious smirk on his face.

“Outside, idiot. Where else?”

“Dream, it’s like -2 degrees celsius out there-”

“I don’t know what that means, but I am not spending the day locked in this room when your *siblings* get to go out and have fun,” Dream points out and George turns back to the window, seeing Mary, Jack, and Erin hike through the snow.

“You’re so dumb! You’re going to get sick.”

“I’ll be fine! It’s snow.”

Then he tugs up his thick sneakers, leaving George to stand in the golden light and watch his dumbass boyfriend join everyone outside, awkwardly stepping through the wonderland. George liked Christmas and all, especially with Dream here, but he didn’t really like snow. Snow was cold and wet and it burned George’s skin when it got stuck in his shirt. So George did what he does best and he flopped back onto his bed and fell right back asleep, breathing in the scent of Dream as he curls up on his side of the bed.

His blissful nap didn’t last long because he started hearing thuds against his window. It started light and slow. It didn’t bother George enough for him to look out again, so he turned his back to it. But then they started getting harder and more deliberate like someone was throwing chunks of ice at him. That’s when George rolled back out of bed and pulled up his blinds, glaring down at a grinning Erin and Dream with piles of snowballs in their arms. George flips them off just as another

snowball hits his window, sliding down slowly.

“Come on, George!” Erin yells up to him. Her blonde hair was stuffed up in her pink hat, blonde spikes poking the air around her head.

George shakes his head. *No way*, he mouths.

Dream throws a ball and it slams against the window, making him jump. “Stop being dumb and come outside!”

“I said-” George says and he pulls open his window, sticking his head out in the cold air. “-no! It’s way too cold and I’m tired.”

“George! Just come out.”

“He already did. A few years ago,” he hears Erin say, packing snow into a ball. Dream laughs at the joke and throws another snowball that hits just under the window.

“Oh my God,” George mutters to himself.

“George!” Dream repeats.

“Dream! Stop throwing snowballs!”

“I will when you come out here!”

“I’m going back insi-” George didn’t finish his sentence because a ball of ice crashed into his face, hitting him square in the nose and his eyes water from cold numbing his cheeks. George wipes the snow off and sees Dream standing beneath him with his jaw hanging open in shock, a snowball in his clutch, and Erin staring up at him from the ground with an identical expression.

“George, listen to me, I did not mean to hit you-”

George stares at him and he nods, ducking back inside and he shuts the window. He waits a minute and watches as Dream and Erin exchanged panicked words and that’s when he grins, grabbing his blue coat from his closet, and he books it to the back door of his house. George may not like snow, but he will never pass up the opportunity to fight Dream.

“Oh my G- Dream. Dream-” Erin says, slapping his boyfriend’s arm in fear as George slowly scoops up the dense snow in his gloved hands. Dream looks over and gets attacked with a snowball thrown into his shoulder, white powder exploding around him like smoke from a gunshot.

“Hey! Look at that, you’re actually outside,” Dream teases. George doesn’t respond because he was too busy scooping up more snow. The sky was a bright blue and the tree branches in George’s yard hung low with snow as he continued to throw lazy but rapid snowballs at his cousin and boyfriend.

Dream eventually makes it to him and grabs his wrist before he can smush snow into his face. “Hey, c’mon, you don’t wanna do that.”

“You threw *ice* at me!”

“It was an accident!”

George pauses for a second and then he limps his wrist, crumbling the snowball in his fingers. He has an idea. “That hurt me, you know...”

“The snowball?”

George gives him a look. “You’re an idiot. Of course it was the snowball.”

“Aw, Georgie, I didn’t know it hurt!” Dream says in a high-pitched voice, pinching his cheeks, and George slaps his hands away.

“You owe me for that.”

“Oh, do I now?”

“Yeah.”

Dream smiles and he does exactly what George wanted. His boyfriend kisses him. It was hard for George not to give in to the warm kiss, but he stayed strong and he took that excess snow that was in his hand, and he shoved it right down the back of Dream’s shirt.

“What the hell?!” Dream cries as George bursts out laughing, clapping his hands in delight as he watches Dream try to shake the snow out. “George!”

“Sucker! That’s what you get!” George howls. Dream gives up with the snow and starts to fight back. George’s laughter dies quickly.

“Oh, *fuck*,” Erin mutters under her breath as Dream looms over George with a huge armful of snow. She motions for the twins to sit next to her on the back porch steps, putting her chin in her hand. “This is bound to be good.”

“Dream. Stop. I will go back inside,” George says. It was an empty threat and Dream knew this.

“Oh, George. We both know it’s too late for you to go crawling back into bed,” Dream responds. The words send jolts of panic down his spine even though his heart was fluttering with how good Dream looked with snow in his hair. George holds his breath as he looks down at the snow ready to be thrown at him, as Dream leans close to his ear.

“Run.”

George takes off in a heartbeat, tripping and galloping over the snow as Dream plows through it and stays right on him. George desperately tries to fling snow back at him. George tries a lot of things, actually, to fend off the hunter that kept throwing snow chunks at his back. Dream had no skill when it came to decorating, but when it came to throwing ice perfectly into George’s shoulder blades, he was scarily skillful.

“Stop! Please!” George shrieks as he trips down into the freezing ground.

Dream laughs at him, dropping the armful of snow on his head. “Oh, George!”

“Dream! Stop! I’m serious!” George yells through laughter. He scrambles up and tries to run again with his heart pounding in his chest and ears, sweat rolling down his temple under his hat, and breath coming out in small puffs of white. He was slowing down as he reached the front yard. It turns out running through snow was a lot like running through peanut butter, making George exhausted.

This was ultimately his doom.

“George!” Dream screams and George tried to move faster, but he couldn’t. It wasn’t long before

he felt a body slam into his side and tackle him into the deep snow, sinking him to the frozen ground, and George closes his eyes in fear as Dream lays on top of him. For a minute, the two don't say anything. They lay there in the winter morning, chests heaving from running, and then Dream presses his cold face into George.

"I got you," Dream mutters as he smushes snow into George's face.

"It's not fair- your legs are longer than mine. You can move through the snow faster," George says.

"Come on now. You asked to be chased."

"You threw snow at me," George reminds him.

"You were being a baby."

"And you're crushing me! Off. Get off," George says and he pushes a stubbornly floppy Dream up until he has to stand. "God, I miss it when you were scared to even look in my direction."

"You don't mean that," Dream says a little too harshly and George gives him a weird look. Dream's face falls for a second and he draws little lines in the snow, not saying anything, and George remembers his parents and how he shut off his phone a little too quick in front of George that morning.

"Everything good? With your parents?"

"Yeah. Yes. Well," Dream says, sighing, "it's just that...I dunno. Wanna head inside?"

George blinks at him. "Dream-"

"It's cold."

It was. It was very cold. For a second, George thought he saw Dream hide back in himself like he did some days, and George felt that annoyance prick at his heart again. A year later and Dream still had these episodes that made him shut down George, but he couldn't get mad at him because that wasn't fair. Dream was already doing so much to make it up to George for experimenting with him.

George swallows, shoving himself aside, and he hooks a pinky with Dream as they walk back to the back porch. Dream doesn't say anything. But he does grab George's hand and he leads him to the living room, eyes still upset, and they sit next to each other as they watch the TV blindly. George wanted to ask him what was going on and what happened with his parents- shit, he was *dying* to fucking know what his parents had to say about them.

"I..." George starts and then stops. He's never been in a situation like this and he can see Dream's grip tighten on his phone that kept buzzing in his hand.

"I'll be right back," Dream said.

George can hear hushed whispers in the hall and he picked out words like *Christmas vacation*, *mom*, *calling*, and George's personal favorite, *the bear under the tree*. He didn't get it and he didn't need to.

Dream eventually stumbles back into the room and that's when George sees that he was wrong about Dream losing himself again. His boyfriend grabs him and pulls him until he's laying on his

chest between his legs, large hands warming his numb fingers up. George smiles to himself and he relaxes into the scent of snow and pine.

“I’m okay,” Dream says out loud suddenly, but it sounds more like he was trying to tell himself that. George pretends he doesn’t hear it and all he does is draw repeated smiley faces into Dream’s palm as they watch the news. They stay like that for a while. Dream would occasionally repeat the words to himself again and again and George’s faces would pick right back up on his hand. As selfish as it sounds, he didn’t want Dream to start this mood up again while he was here in person and he was determined to make this Christmas as perfect as possible.

When Mary and Jack come running into the living room with melting snow falling behind them, Erin screaming at them, hot on their heels, he hears Dream repeat the words. Only this time, George turns to look at Dream and he whispers,

“You are. You are okay.”

Fourth Day

Chapter Notes

fuq it- if i got 8 more days, im giving it an angst plot its what i do babey

Dream reads the messages appearing on his phone, ignoring the building pressure behind his eyes by screwing them shut. They, the messages, wouldn't stop. Everyday. Every hour. Every *minute* a ghost of something would follow him and no matter how hard he tried to look forward, the demon would sink its claws into his gut and rip him back.

That's why he was on this walk—another desperate attempt to run from something he still refused to look at. Constantly overcompensating with affection to make up for the fact that he was terrified. Dream's hands trembled from the cold as he powers down his phone completely and finally silences the building texts and missed calls, sliding it and his hands into his pockets. He's been walking for ages. Far past the frozen pond with burning memories and along a slippery, wet concrete path littered with dead leaves and slush.

He kicks at a stone. "I'm okay," he whispers to himself. He closes his eyes as he remembers George's hands on his face yesterday when he kept agreeing with him, muttering sweet nothings to bring some sort of comfort. Dream was still a fucking coward, though, and he still had to leave. And for what? Because the messages were getting to him.

"I'm okay." His pace quickens as he walks further into the town.

"I'm okay," he repeats, trying to control his hitched breathing.

I'm okay; he thought as he saw himself in the reflection of a store window. He stares into his own green eyes, his mom's eyes, and he runs a quick hand to fix his blonde hair that was his father's. He takes a deep breath and presses his lips together. *No matter how hard I try, they'll be here,* he thought.

You are. You are okay, George's voice echos in his temples and a small flame of comfort sparks in his chest. He had to keep himself together for George because he liked George- he really did. No demon or fucked up feelings were going to tear him away. He just...needed to keep reminding himself that.

By the time Dream works up the courage to turn around, the afternoon sun was high in the sky, but the temperature dropped, making his hands hurt and his nose run. His sneakers were soaked. His joints were stiff and they hurt. Dream couldn't feel half of his body and his southern blood was screaming to be put back into Florida's warm summer waters. So, when he does finally pull himself together to be presentable, he walks up George's porch steps and lets himself into the warm home. Slush and snow slide off his shoes as he stands there in the doorway, staring at George, who leaned against the stair railing in front of him, eyes shut. Dream smiles. George always waited for him.

"Hey," he whispers after he strips out of his wet hat and sweatshirt, cold still in his bones.

"George."

George opens his rich brown eyes clouded with sleep. "Where'd you go?"

"Just into town. I needed to think."

"Think? You never think," George responds. Dream's smile grows brighter. "Ew, why are you all wet?" Dream then presses his numb fingers onto George's hot cheek, making his boyfriend's eyes widen and he ducks away from his hand.

"Take a wild guess, dumb-dumb."

George gives him a look and he takes Dream's icy hands into his, slowly warming them back up by simply holding them. "You okay?"

"Amazing."

"Dream."

"George."

"Are you lying?" He asks so simply that Dream couldn't find an answer right away. He wanted to say no. He wanted to pull back away from him and be by himself, letting the weak swirl punt his stomach over and over until he threw up whatever feelings were inside him. But he smiles and gives George a forehead kiss because it's George. George didn't deserve to have another Christmas ruined from Dream. George deserved to have a perfectly okay boyfriend.

"Never," he lies. George studies him for a moment, Dream 100% thinking that he saw through his bullshit, and eventually, he nods at him, and Dream felt relief spread through his body.

"Aunt Lily and Erin are in the living room watching movies and my parents are in the kitchen. They wanted to talk to you," George says. Dream lowers his gaze, cringing slightly at how his little episode looked to everyone else- storming off out of nowhere after typing furiously on his phone. George stands on a step so he can run his fingers through Dream's hair. "You'll be fine, don't worry."

Dream was not fine. One hot, painful shower and two cups of hot cocoa later, he was sitting at the counter with George's parents and a letter between them. The letter was from his family.

He can taste the hot cocoa in his throat.

His phone feels like a brick in his sweatpants pocket.

It burns.

He places in on the counter, face down, and he clenches his jaw until his teeth feel like they're about to crack.

"It's from your family, Dream," Rose says in a voice so gentle that he wanted to cry.

"We know how...hard... things are for you right now and when they got into contact with George-" Steven starts to say.

Dream's head snaps up. "They were talking to George?"

"Well, it was before- months ago. When you guys were first talking about coming back and George gave them our address because they had said they wanted to send stuff for you to have for Christmas this year," Rose explained. She pushes the envelope closer to him and Dream leans

further away. “Steven and I thought that we would check in on you before dropping this. George told us that you gave them the news.”

“Congrats, by the way,” Steven adds a little awkwardly. Rose sighs at him.

“T-thanks?” He coughs and tries again. “Thank you. Um, yeah. It’s not easy...but I’m fine. I’m okay,” he says.

“You make him really happy, you know. I’ve never seen George this excited for Christmas since he was a wee child,” Rose laughs. Dream smiles politely at her. *No pressure to keep it up, jeez.*

After a few more minutes of double-checking to make sure Dream was okay with the letter (he wasn’t, but he couldn’t bring himself to tell them to burn it), he finally convinces them that it was fine and that he was going to go open it upstairs. However, he didn’t. The letter sliced his hand open as he walked up to George’s room and threw it into the depths of his suitcase. He didn’t want to see what they had to say.

When he does find George in the living room, literally jumping on top of him when he was laying down across the sofa, he presses his ear to George’s heart and silently mouths *I’m okay* to each beat.

“What are you doing, weirdo?” George asks, flicking his forehead.

“Listening to your stomach. It sounds like a bunch of whales.”

“Oh my God, shut up. Please.”

“Blrrgh, blagh, slwoop,” Dream mimics noises that make George groan.

“You’re so annoying.”

“I’m hurt, Georgie.”

George flicks his head again. “Stop with the Georgie thing or I’ll roll you off this couch.”

“You can’t.”

“I will. I absolutely will.”

““ *Eye ab-sol-ootlee wheel,* ”” Dream mocks. George glares.

“Dream, I’m this close-” George holds his thumb and pointer finger up with no space between them. “-to pushing you off.”

“All talk, not bite, Georgie.”

“Oh, you’re going *down* .”

“Promise?” Dream dares, lifting his head so their breaths mingle together. He sees George’s eyes glance down to his lips and Dream grins.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll like to see you try,” Dream says.

George grabs Dream’s shoulders and actually manages to slide him halfway off of the couch,

granted that's after a lot of struggling and wrestling, but see, that's when Dream's fast thinking helps him out. He wraps his arms around George's waist as he's fully shoved off and he drags his boyfriend down with him. The two land on the carpet with a muffled thud. They were wedged between the red couch and the coffee table in the middle, as George desperately tries to fight his way out of Dream's arms. Their limbs were tangled together and George kept stepping on him, hands grabbing for his hair, clothes, and hands to help steady him as he tries to stand. Dream digs his fingers into George's sensitive ribs, making his boyfriend fold.

"Alright! Okay!" George laughs, prying Dream's hands away from him.

Dream finds him again quickly. "No way! You brought this on yourself!"

"Because you were listening to my stomach like some...some weirdo! I don't know!"

George tries to get up again to run away and he's somehow back in Dream's arms a second later- either because Dream was a step ahead of him or because he didn't want to actually leave. Dream holds his light to him on the floor as he tortures it with tickles. He was drowning in George's laughs. George seemed to be the only thing that kept the demon following Dream at bay, despite him being the reason why the demon was there in the first place.

"Stop! I'm going to pee! Dream-" George gasps. Dream laughs and presses his face into the crook of George's neck, biting the skin lightly to fight a huge grin. George leans his head back so it's resting against the taller boy's shoulder. Dream can feel him shudder against him.

"That's so nasty, George!" Dream exclaims. He presses a kiss into the red teeth marks on George's pale skin. *Whoops.*

"You weren't stopping!"

"You pushed me off!"

George scoffs. "Fully deserved."

"Whatever, I won anyway," Dream says.

"No? I did because I got you off of the damn couch."

"Hm. Yeah, but you were the first to give up-"

"What. The hell. Are you guys talking about?" Erin says, twisting around in the chair in front of them.

"We're talking about how Dream lost the fight," George responds. Dream shakes his head at Erin, mouthing *I totally won* in her direction.

Her face drops from worried to understanding. "Oh, *fighting* , okay."

"Duh, what else would it be- oh," George says. Dream wheezes and gently punches George in the jaw.

"You're such an idiot."

"I don't care. I won."

"Sure, George."

“I hate you,” George declares, sinking deeper into Dream’s chest and completely contradicts himself by holding Dream's hands. George had a weird habit of always finding Dream's hands to fiddle with them: bending them in weird ways, making them criss-cross, or even just tracing the lines of his palm. It bothered Dream at first, but he didn't care anymore. Sitting on the uncomfortable floor with George nestled in his arms was a nice change from the bitter walk he took, like, an hour ago. Dream wasn’t complaining.

He hears his phone chime in the kitchen and his stomach falls.

At least he wasn’t complaining *yet* .

He swallowed the familiar poison and he buries his face against George. He starts to whisper stories about Florida and how much he missed him so only his boyfriend could hear, desperately trying to keep his mind grounded into right now. He meant every single word and he loved how warm George made him feel. But, God, no matter how many times they talked and tried to break through Dream’s wall, it always rebuilt itself eventually. George huffs a small laugh at something he says during his mindless babble, bringing him back. Dream tightens his arms around George, his fingers digging into George’s shirt, and he swore to himself right then and there that he was going to make this the best Christmas ever for his light- even if it destroys him trying.

Fifth Day

George blamed Erin for this.

“Oh my God,” George breathes as he eyes the ungodly amount of mistletoe hanging from...well, everywhere. Every door frame he walked under, every high point in the house, and every object that George used daily had mistletoe taped to it. Even his phone was matching the pattern.

“George,” Dream says, grinning.

“No. No! Go away-”

“C’mon. George.”

“Dream, I swear, you better back up right now.”

“It’s tradition, though.”

George’s eyes flick up to the mistletoe Dream was holding above their heads. “It’s a stupid one.” He then turns to look at Erin, who was lacing her boots to leave with everyone else. “You suck,” he snaps. She nods but looks smug with the monster she created.

“Have fun, Georgie!” Rose calls and then everyone abandons them in the house- abandoning *George* to fend off his mistletoe obsessed boyfriend. Dream dips his head and George swerves away.

“No! Dream, I hate mistletoe- we are not doing this!”

“How can you hate mistletoe?!” Dream laughs. “It’s free kisses!”

“I don’t care! It’s stupid and I would rather be kissed because of actual emotions, not some-” George pauses to rip the plant out of Dream’s grip, “-stupid tradition.”

“Good point, but I would like to bring up the fact that I do like you a lot, so it would be *very* emotional if we kissed right now.”

George glares. “No.”

“Please?”

“No.”

“George- don’t you want to participate in all the cute Christmas stuff this year?” Dream says, edging closer until George backs up into the living room archway, grinning lips brushing against his. George turns his face.

“Mistletoe is literally so dumb.”

“I know you want to, George. Kiss me.”

“It’s just kissing under a plant. It makes no sense-”

“Kiss. Me.”

George moves around the arch and into the living room, fighting how hot his face was getting. He did want to kiss, but he refused to give in to the tradition. He thought it was stupid ever since he was a kid and he was not about to have his boyfriend, a guy named *Clay*, tear his 24-year long streak from him.

“Heyheyhey!” Dream says quickly. George is grabbed by the shoulders and yanked to Dream’s chest. “Look up.”

“I really don’t want to.”

Dream slides his hands down his arms, leaving a trail of goosebumps. “Do it.”

George slowly looks at the mistletoe taped up to the fan above him and groans, shrugging Dream off of him, and he walks away to sit on the couch. The twins were watching *Frosty the Snowman* before they left with his family and George would’ve gotten the remote to change it; however, he saw another piece of mistletoe lying on it. This was ridiculous. He hated Erin for telling Dream about George’s streak. He hated her. So. Much.

Dream moves to him so he’s leaned over George, face unbearably close to his, and he pulls out another plant from his hoodie pocket. “C’mon, Georgie. Give in. I know it’s killing you,” Dream murmurs and he places a kiss on George’s neck.

“*I’m* about to kill *you*. Get off!” George laughs and he shoves Dream off him. “Let me watch the stupid snowman.”

“Don’t disrespect Frosty like that.”

“I really don’t think you care.”

“No, I do,” Dream says in complete seriousness. George gives him a weird look. “You know, my dog died when I was watching Frosty. Every year since then, my family and I have watched Frosty in his honor.”

George’s eyebrows knit together. “What?”

“I’m offended, George.”

“I don’t...okay?”

“Wow, you don’t care?! I can’t believe-”

“No, I do! It’s just kind of weird. That’s all.”

“You calling my dog weird?”

“No!” George cries and he rubs his forehead. “I mean, yeah, I guess I am. But you-”

“You know, I say you owe me a kiss just to make up for the fact you called my dead dog tradition weird,” Dream says. Dream dips down again and grabs George’s chin to line up their lips and George can feel his heart race as his entire body buzzes from his boyfriend’s touch. Good thing he realizes it before it was too late.

“Wait- You’ve never had a dog! Off! Go away. I’m so serious!” George cries and he gets up off of the couch after pushing Dream down to the other side.

“Just kiss me, George!” Dream wraps his arms around his waist and pulls him to the couch. George

uses every ounce of strength he has to pry Dream off him before swiping at the plant held above his head. It flies to the wall and slides down behind the couch.

“How many of these do you have?!” George yells and Dream just laughs at him.

“I’m gonna break you, George,” Dream says in a low voice in his ear and George fights a shudder in his spine. “This is the year that you’re gonna lose.”

“Dream. Let. Go.” George pleads.

“I will when you kiss me.”

“No. Never.”

Dream pulls him tighter until George can feel him in every nerve of his body. “Then you’re staying right here and you’re watching Frosty with me.”

“Well, if it’s watching Frosty, then- Dream!” George exclaims when Dream reaches up to tilt his face up to the ceiling and he stares at the mistletoe taped up there. “You’re joking.”

“You’re kissing me.”

“You’re absolutely joking.”

Dream rests his chin on George’s head. “Not one bit.”

I’m stuck, George accepted. He was out mistletoe-d and he was already tired from fighting against Dream. His 24-year streak was about to die and all because Dream couldn’t keep it to himself and this sucked until he had an idea.

If Dream wanted a kiss so badly, then so be it.

“Fine,” George sighs and he cranes his neck to look at Dream. “I’ll kiss you. But I want to hold the mistletoe.”

“You’re just gonna move it. I’m not stupid.”

“Debatable, but I promise I won’t.”

Dream eyes him but ultimately presses the plastic plant into his palm. George turns himself until he’s nose to nose with Dream on the couch. He holds the plant above them, just like he promised.

“Ready?” George whispers and Dream nods, staring deep into him. George always liked Dream’s eyes. They were a lighter color and so clear that it reminded him of crystals, and they were always so bright like the moon. His eyelashes were long and dark against his flushed face as he closes them when George drags a hand down his jaw, lips barely touching. *Perfect*.

George presses his mouth to Dream’s temple. “Keep them closed, okay?”

Dream nods.

George goes back to his mouth and carefully brings his arm down until the mistletoe was next to his face. This was when George had to move quickly. He pulls his face to the side a bit to replace his hovering lips with the plastic berries of the mistletoe, smiling to himself when Dream didn’t pick up on the switch, and he bites his tongue as he pressed it to Dream’s lips. *Got him!*

“No way!” George shrieks when Dream kisses the berries back and that breaks it. Dream’s eyes fly open and he recoils back, looking at the plant in shock as George slides off the couch from laughing too hard.

“You little motherfucker!” Dream yells. God, his face was so red! *This is what he gets!* George thought as little squeaks come from his chest.

“24 years, Dream! And guess what?” George says as he stands, wiping a fake tear from his eye. “Next year, it’ll be 25.”

Dream’s jaw clenches. “Whatever.”

“Good try, though.”

“Whatever,” Dream repeats and he sinks into the couch. George rolls his eyes and throws Dream’s lucky mistletoe at his face before walking into the kitchen.

“What an idiot,” George mutters as he rips down another piece of mistletoe from the fridge.

“Say that again?” Dream says behind him and George turns with the carton of apple juice in his hand.

George takes a sip straight out of it before saying, “I said that you were an idiot.”

Dream shakes his head. “You’re a heathen.”

“Hm, well, you wanted to kiss this heathen.”

“Still do.”

“You’re not going to give up, are you?”

“Not a chance,” Dream says, walking to him, but George moves away before he could reach him. “Stop playing hard to get.”

“Why? Is it bothering you?”

“Yeah.”

“Too fucking bad. Go away and let me drink my juice in peace,” George responds. Dream stands behind him and wraps his arms around George, pressing their cheeks together. Dream was being unusually lovely lately and George both loved and hated it. He was glad Dream seemed to get past whatever caused him to walk out yesterday, but now it felt like George couldn’t breathe without his boyfriend being right there. Although, he did like this bit Dream was doing.

“Just one?” Dream asks.

“No.”

“So, what? We aren’t kissing at all?”

“Not under the mistletoe.”

“There’s none above us, right now.” George looks up to double-check and sure enough, there was nothing.

"I guess... one can't hurt, right?" George says. He feels Dream smile.

"Nope! C'mere."

He turns George until their chests press together and he wastes no time finding George's lips, holding his face still with one hand as the other runs down his side and rests on his hip bone, sending electricity down to his stomach and it weakens his knees. Dream's finger hooks on his pajama waistband and pulls him closer. George's mind went blank. He couldn't even think about the fact that the stupid Elf on The Shelf was watching them with a scary grin. George's heart was beating so quickly and his lungs were shrinking from the lack of air and he swore Dream was going to kiss him to death in his own kitchen. When Dream's fingers dig into his hip, a small noise escapes from the back of George's throat, and his boyfriend seemed to kiss him even harder. *Yeah, I'm definitely going to die here.*

Dream gently bites at his bottom lip as he pulls away, panting slightly. "That was... nice."

What a response. "See? It's better with emotion."

"Eh, I think mistletoe can bring out emotion, too."

George wraps his arms around Dream's neck. "I'm still not going to do it."

"I'll get you, George."

"Doubt it. I'm going to go get changed."

George didn't leave to get changed for another five minutes because of Dream, but when he finally stepped out of his room in a gray hoodie, he finds that all the mistletoe that was once hung all over suddenly disappeared. George let out a sigh of relief. It seems like Dream finally gave up. He was unbreakable.

At least he thought this until he walked down the stairs again and stared at the hallway ceiling that was absolutely covered with every single piece of mistletoe in the house. Dream was standing at the front door with his arms crossed and George's face falls.

"No," he says and he starts to walk up the stairs.

"You can't escape it, George," Dream says, "I kept some hidden. If I don't get you here, I will get you up there."

"You're terrifying."

"I know."

"And awful."

"I've been told."

"This is cheating!"

Dream laughs. "Again, not the first time I've heard that I cheated."

"You're really, *really* not giving up, are you?"

"Might as well walk my way, pretty boy," Dream says with outstretched arms. George sighs and eyes all the mistletoe around him. He really was going to lose his streak to a guy named Clay.

“Remember how last year you were scared to even talk about the *almost* kiss?”

Dream’s face falls a bit. “Y-yeah?”

“Nothing. It’s just...” *Weird. I never thought we would be doing this.*

“Just...what?”

“Nothing,” George mumbles and he walks to Dream, meeting him under the lowest hanging mistletoe and he plucks it off of the ceiling. It really was time for his long fight with the tradition to end. Not because Dream won or he was tricked into doing it, but because Dream deserved it. George remembered all the nights he would wake up George, on the verge of crying, because he thought he couldn’t do it or he thought something was wrong with him. George meets his boyfriend’s stunning eyes. *Now he’s begging me to kiss him.*

“If Erin asks, I hit 25 years next year, okay?” George says finally. Seeing the grin emerge on Dream’s face was worth it. Dream, himself, was worth it.

“You got it, Georgie.”

“Stop talking,” George demands and Dream kisses the freckles on his cheeks.

“Why don’t you make me, Georgie?”

George has no problem doing so because he knows how to make Dream become putty in his hands. As they kiss under green leaves and shiny plastic berries, the morning sun bringing blue into the dark hallway, George places his hand on the back of Dream’s neck and tilts their heads, kissing him deeper. He poured every ounce of love into Dream’s mouth until his tongue hurt and his jaw ached. Dream tasted like magic and magic tasted a lot like pure sugar.

George’s fingers dig into Dream’s hair as his boyfriend’s hands wrap around his waist and he dips them down like they were dancing. George giggles and rubs their noses together, putting his foot up in a mock tango position.

“You’re so dumb,” Dream says quietly between small kisses. It looks like Dream couldn’t get enough of him.

Then again, neither could George. “Shut up and kiss me, idiot.”

“Look who’s begging to be kissed now.”

“You,” George states. Dream’s laugh chimes in George’s head as they kiss again and again, hands roaming to touch every inch of each other. They were perfectly in sync. Dream’s mouth leaves a trail of kisses down to his neck as he aimlessly reaches up to a mistletoe, pulling away from George slowly, to tuck the plastic plant behind his ear.

“I told you mistletoe can be emotional,” Dream says.

“I guess you could say I lost my mistletoe virginity,” George jokes and Dream’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise, the smile dropping quickly.

“What. What did you just say?”

“You know! Because-”

“And the moment is ruined. It was nice while it lasted.” Dream starts to walk away.

“No, no! I’m sorry!” George laughs, pulling on Dream’s arm to bring him back. “Come back.”

“Alright, c’mon now, there was no reason to say that,” Dream said.

“I was joking!”

“Well, I didn’t appreciate it. Did you know my dead dog used to take mistletoe...wait,” Dream says and he watches helplessly as a smile of disbelief spreads on George’s face. “That is *not* what I meant. George, please-”

“Your dog did what, Dream? Continue with that.”

“You wanna kiss again? I think you do.”

George places a hand over Dream’s mouth as he leans in again. “Finish the sentence.” Dream says something into his hand so George moves it. “What?” He asks.

“I said,” Dream starts, “that you’re stupid and that’s not where I wanted to go with the joke.”

“Ah, so it was a joke?”

“We made it pretty clear I’ve never had a dog before.”

George shakes his head at him. “I hope you know I’m telling Erin that your dead dog used to do that.”

Dream sighs in defeat. “Your words, not mine.”

“You hinted at it. It counts.”

“And to think I was going to let the mistletoe kisses slide because they aren’t even real.”

“Wait, I’m sorry! Please let it slide.”

Dream grins and fixes the plant behind his ear. “For you, I will.”

George stands on his tippy toes to plant a kiss on Dream’s jaw, and what do you know- Dream made sure to catch George up on every single missed mistletoe kiss. He counted quietly between each one, finding new places to kiss that made George’s heart leap and nerves tingle. As Dream focuses his attention back to George’s mouth, moving methodically, George promises himself that he would do this every year because mistletoe kisses were awesome, amazing, and held so many emotions. Dream was right, but George wouldn’t tell him that. *It would go right up to his big head*, George thought to himself with a smile.

God, he was being kissed breathless- head light and adrenaline racing cool through his veins from the high Dream was putting him in. Everything about Dream was perfect to him and he was glad that he could have this, despite his growing annoyance with how clingy Dream seemed to be this year. Did George care at the moment? No, of course not. In fact, George loved how real Dream felt in his hands. George placed a palm over Dream’s heart and counted every beat until fireworks exploded in his heart as Dream muttered three words to him.

And that was enough to convince him that everything was okay.

Sixth Day

“Dream?”

He turns to look at George, red beanie pulled over his brown hair and worried eyes staring into his. “I gotta go,” he says into the phone. He hangs up before his mom could spit any more insults into his ear.

“Everything ok-”

“Are we leaving now?” Dream says, cutting him off before he could ask that question. He was tired of everyone looking at him like he was fragile. He was tired of people asking him if he was okay because he was. He was okay.

George looks taken back. “Yeah, everyone’s in the car...are you su-”

“Just a phone call from Sapnap,” Dream lies, “he’s wondering how things are going here.”

“Oh.”

Dream forces a warm smile on his lips and he grabs George’s hand, pulling him to the car. Dream didn’t mean to keep everyone waiting- his phone started ringing the first time he got in and he couldn’t ignore it this time. As much as it killed him to hear his mother’s voice say those things about him- about *George* - he missed her. Dream’s wondering and longing ended up ruining his whole day.

He and George were shoved in the middle row of Rose’s gray SUV. There was a comfortable amount of distance between him and his friend- sorry, boyfriend, and he folded his arms when he sees George reach out to him. He has to ignore the pang of guilt plummeting into his ribs when George slowly turns away from him, putting his chin in his hand. Dream knew he had a promise to keep. However, it was hard to do when all he could hear was his mother’s comforting voice say that this was all in his head.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. He knew he should’ve left it on the charger.

Dream takes a deep breath and leans his forehead against the cold glass, and he tries to focus on the quiet Christmas music playing in the car, watching the gray town blur into white as they head into the country. Dream has never gone tree shopping since he was one of those families with the fake trees back in Florida. He never got to experience the joy of picking out the ‘perfect tree’ according to Steven. It turns out it was anything but joyous.

“We aren’t getting a bloody tree that’s barely taller than George,” Steven snaps at Rose, who was poking at a short one. George scoffs.

“Well, we aren’t getting one that’s taller than you!” Rose retorts.

“Why not? We have the room!”

“The angel, Steven! The angel can’t be cramped against the ceiling; that would be an aesthetic nightmare,” she said. Dream and George exchanged a look as the two go back and forth in a typical married way, pointing to super tiny trees and huge Rockefeller sized ones to exaggerate each other’s points.

“Dream!” Rose says suddenly and she turns to him. He pretends like he didn’t jump a bit. “What do you think?”

“Um...I dunno. Short?” *Always appeal to the mom.*

“Oy! Thatta boy,” Rose exclaims and she pats a hand against his cheek. Dream is trying really, really, REALLY hard not to see his mom in her. Steven mutters something under his breath and that takes the attention off of him and just in time too. His phone starts going off in his pocket.

George glances down at his lit up hoodie. “You gonna answer?”

“Probably not.”

“Is it Sapnap again?”

Dream shrugs and says, “Maybe.”

“You can go answer if you want. I’ll deal with them,” George offers and he nods to his parents, who were arguing in front of the farmworker, struggling to hold up a tall tree. Dream almost says no. He’s almost strong enough to ignore his mom’s calls and actively participate with George’s family. He knew George didn’t know and was trying to be helpful, but he had no idea the mousetrap he just lured him in.

Dream reaches in and stares at his smiling mother’s contact photo and he picks up.

“Hello?”

“Clay.”

“What.”

“You left to go spend time with George,” she states in a simple tone. In any other case, it would’ve been an obvious statement that made him roll his eyes and fire something snarky back, but there was something angry in her tone.

“I did.”

“He doesn’t like you.”

Dream had long walked away from everyone at this point, walking in the crunchy snow with his eyes closed. “He does. And I like him.”

“Don’t be an idiot, Clay,” she says, “you’re sick. It’s in your head. Don’t let him...let him *manipulate* you like this because that’s not my boy.”

Tears build up behind his eyes at *my boy* and he has to bite his lips until his bottom one bleeds to keep from crying.

“Come home, Clay.”

“This...that’s not fair.”

“I’m not letting you get pulled into something that isn’t real. That isn’t fair to me or your father. What about your sister? She’s wondering where you are this year.”

It hurts. “I’m sorry.”

“You should be. Leaving your own family for a boy you don’t even like or know.”

“I’m sorry,” he repeats. *Why am I apologizing? Why am I apologizing? Why the fuck am I saying sorry?!*

“You’re off with strangers and convincing yourself you’re in love with a boy. That family isn’t yours. *He* isn’t your family. This isn’t you. This is not the Clay I know. My little boy would come home and talk to all the pretty tourist girls like he used to do,” she hisses, and then the line dies. Tears run boiling on his chapped cheeks as he stares blankly into the snow. A tear slides down his face and lands into the snow beneath him, eating away at the white like acid.

“I did that to make you happy,” he whispers into his silent phone. The swirl in his gut brings bile into his mouth and he’s stuck frozen in the middle of the field of trees, the laughter of families chiming around him. Was she...right?

Dream sees George talking with his family with the perfect sized tree between them. This wasn’t his family. It never was. Then again, he couldn’t go back to Florida and see a family that won’t even accept him. His world comes tumbling down around him as he realizes that he was standing in a field with people he barely knew in a foreign country across an ocean. Dream was lost.

George catches his eye and waves to him. The dark swirl tightens its grip around his heart. Dream, for the first time in a year, had no idea what he wanted.

The frigid air cuts his lungs as he forces himself to breathe and he takes his time walking over because he had a goddamn promise to keep. He wasn’t going to be the cause of another painful Christmas for George. So he puts an awkward arm around his shoulders. He feels wrong in his skin, like a crab too big for its shell.

George leans into him as he laughs at a joke his dad says. Dream doesn’t move even though it’s killing him to pull away. It hurts.

Everything. Fucking. Hurts.

“Help me with the tree, won’t you?” Steven says, snapping Dream out of his head.

“Course,” he responds. He’s grateful he has a reason to back away from George. The needles of the pine tree poke into his face and the bark scrapes his hands raw, but he helps George’s father slam it down on the car, both cringing at the harsh impact.

“It’s fine,” Steven says to him.

Dream winces as a branch snaps off and falls onto the gravel parking lot. “For sure.”

The ride back was equally as silent, but Dream tried to make an effort this time with George. He held his pinky and ran a thumb across his knuckles, but he was so far into his head that he didn’t even realize his phone was going off with messages in his pocket.

“Everything good with Sapnap?” George asks.

“Yeah, he’s just...bored.”

George snorts. “Sounds like him.”

Dream looks at him. He felt like a zombie. George was perfect and of course, Dream knew that George liked him. Just yesterday, he was kissing George brainless in the hallway and he loved the

feeling of having him in his hands with his back against the wall, so clearly, Dream also had feelings. They felt all wrong, though. Illegal. Like he had to step on eggshells to keep from pushing it, and now hearing his mom say that it could be in his head, the eggshells suddenly turned into glass shards and multiplied by a billion.

He presses a quick kiss on George's lips when he jokingly presses their foreheads together, mockingly staring at him with the same intensity Dream was. Then he looks at Steven in the rearview mirror and the two meet eyes.

Dream needed to talk to George's dad.

When they get back to George's home, both Rose and George leaving quickly to leave Dream and Steven to fight with the tree, Dream takes the opportunity.

"I think I need to go home," Dream said. Steven grunts as they roll the tree off and it flops into the deep snow.

"Why do you say that?"

"My parents."

"Ah," Steven says, "I see. Now, are they telling you this or is it coming from you?"

Dream thought for a minute. "A bit of both, I guess."

"Are they calling you?"

"They...yeah. They won't stop."

"You know," Steven starts and they carry the tree up the porch, but he stops them outside of the door so he can talk to Dream, "you're a smart guy, Dream. I know it's hard for you and I can tell you it means a lot to everyone that you're trying. Especially George. However, if you believe that it's time for you to see your family-" He pauses to shift the tree in his arms. "-then that's completely up to you. We cannot tell you yes or no because you've already done more than enough for George this year."

"What do you mean?" He asks, his attention peaking at the mention of George.

"It's been a rough year for him, too. He would call his mother at the weirdest times and tell her-" He stops.

"Tell her what?"

"...Not my place to say, Dream. If I were you, I would wait to decide if you want to go home or not. Did you read the letter?"

"Yeah."

"I have three kids, Dream. Don't lie, please."

"...no..." Dream mumbles, shame rising in his cheeks. Steven pats his shoulder.

"I wouldn't. In fact, if you sneak it to me, I'll throw it in the fire," Steven jokes.

"Thanks," Dream said.

“Anytime. Those homophobic bastards have no idea what a great boyfriend they raised. You’re a good person, Dream. Even if you have a...horrendous...taste in trees,” Steven shakes his head as Dream laughs. “I would also double-check with George about leaving first, though.”

“Right.”

“I’ll be honest: he won’t be happy.”

“Is he ever happy with what I do?”

Steven laughs and it’s the first time Dream hears him genuinely laugh like that. “I like you. You give his shit back to him. Now put a happy face on, turn off your phone, and let’s decorate this thing!”

However, George had a very different definition of ‘decorating’ than Dream did. Dream helped hang the ornaments while George sat on the couch with a mug of hot cocoa in his hands, directing Dream on where to hang them.

“That one doesn’t go there,” George says. Dream glares at him over his shoulder as he lets a purple ornament dangle on his finger.

“Well, where does it go?”

George shrugs. “Figure it out.”

“Oh my God, George!” Erin cries. “Hang up your own damn ornaments if you’re going to complain.”

“What? No, I’m comfortable here.” Dream rolls his eyes.

“C’mon, George,” he says. “Get up.”

“Fine, I’ll tell you where to put the stupid-”

“No, I want you to stand up.”

George looks up at him and Dream raises an eyebrow at him. He takes the mug out of George’s hands and gently pulls him up, guiding him to the twinkling tree.

“Show me,” he demands quietly. George gazes at him for a second and he places a hand over Dream’s that had the purple glass ball clutched in it.

“We...put it...here,” he whispers, and he guides Dream’s hands to the middle of the tree, right next to a dog ornament. “We always put the purple one next to Dog’s since it’s her favorite color.”

“That is,” *Cute*, “dumb.”

George giggles and he leads Dream’s hand to pick up a green one in the box, their reflections dancing in the sphere as George places it next to a blue one. “It’s us,” Dream comments.

“Oh, is it? I couldn’t tell.”

“You’re so stupid.”

“Says the guy making *me* place these things,” George retorts. They grab another and another, fingers locked with each other as George continues to guide him, explaining each placement in a

hushed voice. Dream wasn't even paying attention because he was too busy staring down at George. He's blown away at how heavenly he looks. The lights looked like tiny stars in his eyes and it reminded Dream of tiny universes, cheekbones dusted with pink from blush and light freckles that looked like cinnamon. Dream doesn't even care that George's family was watching him admire. His skin stopped crawling and he felt himself slowly settle back into his bones carefully.

"Dream!" Jack yells, running himself into his knees. "Georgie says you're doing the angel?"

Dream gives his boyfriend a look. "I am...?"

"Of course!" Rose says, pulling a *very* old angel from a box. Her white dress was yellow from age, and her porcelain face was slack in a blissful expression, an electric candle in her hands.

"I'm flattered, but that seems like an honor for *you*," Dream says and he pokes Jack in the ribs. George smiles at him, something filling his eyes, and Dream has to look away.

"You can just say the angel's ugly," George said.

"Well...I wouldn't call it *that*," he responds.

"Creepy?"

"Getting warmer."

"Nasty?"

The dusty angel is shoved in his hands anyway by Erin. "Something like that," he says.

"You're an idiot," George laughs. Dream's heart shatters, remembering his mom's words, but he forces a laugh.

"Hang it up with me?"

George almost looked surprised. "What?"

"C'mere," he motions with his head.

The two grab both sides of the angel, their fingers brushing, and for a split second, as they reach up together to crown the tree, Dream's love for George overpowers his shitty day and he grabs George's free hand. He loves the tingle up his arm as he locks their fingers together.

"Dream, what are you doing?!"

"I'm trying to put it on! What do you mean what am I doing, George?!"

"You're missing the branch completely-"

"Like you can even see it from down there."

"Shut up! I can see it!"

"You need me to pick you up like I did with your sister earlier?"

"I'm literally about to hit you."

"Litch-rally" Dream mimics, which causes a chorus of protests in the room and it makes him

laugh. He completely forgot he was the only American here.

Dream feels eyes on him and he meets Steven's eyes, reminding him of the conflicting choice he had to make. However, Steven doesn't give him any look or mutter anything to him. Instead, he looks at his son still mindlessly talking, and he smiles, eyes filled with happiness for him, and gives a quick nod to Dream. Almost like...a thank you.

That's when Dream knew his choice. George was happy right now and that's why he had to leave.

Dream lowers his eyes to the floor as he and George reach up to the top of the tree to hang a photograph of George's parents smiling at each other on the rocky beaches of England, ice cream in both of their hands. George looked a lot like his mom. If Dream squinted, he could see that Rose's warm gaze to Steven in the photo was the same look George gave Dream. He really did need to go before that expression turned cold.

He made a promise he couldn't keep up for long. He was already starting to be pulled apart at the seams between trying to be perfect for George and trying to keep up with the exhausting fight with his parents. Dream cracks a joke about the ugly handmade ornament George made when he was younger, making George's laugh chime like bells in the room, and he presses a guilt-filled kiss into his cheek.

I'm sorry, he thought to George. On the bright side, he knew what he was apologizing for this time.

Seventh Day

Dream had done it.

“Thank you guys, again,” Dream says to Rose and Steven when they slide his printed plane ticket to him. “I’m sorry to leave on Christmas Day, but it’s the only open flight I could find.”

“No worries, Dream,” Rose says gently. “Whatever you have to do to feel alright.”

Except he didn’t.

Even when he texted his parents that he would be home for Christmas, he thought that would earn him some respect- some kind of release from the crushing guilt pressing down on him, but instead, his mom sent a half-hearted message about how *she’s* glad he came to his senses. Dream rubs his dry eyes as he sits on George’s stairs. It was late at night and the only light in the house was the warm glow from the kitchen where Steven and Rose were quietly moving around, cleaning up the dishes that were let out to dry. The plane ticket was heavy in his hands.

I wanted this, he told himself. *George needs to be happy.*

God, George. That idiot. The guy who pulled him into this mess to begin with just one year ago, and now here he was, stuck in the thick mud of confusion and love. He didn’t know what love was anymore. He swore to George a few days ago that he loved him under the mistletoe, but now...

Dream lets out a long breath as he folds the ticket and places it in his phone case.

He wasn’t so sure if that was even him talking.

“Hey,” Erin whispers, “Dream?”

Dream turns to her and she was standing at the top of the stairs, messy braid over her shoulder, and she cocks her head at him. “What are you doing up? I thought you and George went to bed?”

“Oh...I just needed to think for a minute,” he responds and she pads down to him, taking a seat on the step.

“Everything good?”

Dream shuts his eyes. “Why does everyone ask that?”

“Because we can tell it’s not,” she says like it’s a commonly known fact.

“Well, it is and we’re working things out,” Dream says.

“Right, because coming out to homophobic parents always goes over great. Dream, it’s been a year. When are you going to give yourself some slack with all of this?”

“I’m trying, Erin.”

“Look, Dream, clearly you and George share something considering the fact that a whole ass year later-”

“You really like the fact that’s been a year, huh?”

Erin picks at her nails. "People who don't love each other don't stick around for a year," she says and the two sit in silence for a moment. "You're trying for George and that in itself should say something, Dream."

Then she gets up and walks into the kitchen where murmurs start and now Dream felt even more lost than he did before. He was trying for George. He spent the last *year* putting up with conflicting thoughts and days where he couldn't make himself talk to his own boyfriend- hell; he also spent days desperately trying to make up for the fact that George must've fallen in love with a version of himself that didn't exist. Dream would spend days shoving all of his feelings aside just to see George smile. He's done it before and he's doing it right now. Then, there are his mom's words. His line of love for George was being blurred as he struggles to remember whether or not he even *wanted* this in the first place.

Dream's head starts to spin and he forces himself to walk up to George's room again, each step triggering a new memory of love that withered away into sand in the demon's hands. Dream stands in George's doorway and gazes sadly at his sleeping boyfriend.

You were so new, he thought to himself. The pond- oh, fuck, George. That was the day you fucking destroyed everything I knew. I couldn't tell if I wanted to kiss you because I liked you or because your aunt got into my head. I told myself it was just a suggestion. I told myself it meant nothing to us, but holy shit, George, you meant everything to me. And I hated you for that.

"It's my fault." The realization dawned on him as gently as a feather falling. It didn't hurt to believe it. It made sense. George was something new and exciting, dangerous, even, to Dream, and it made sense for him to drag all of this along. All of this shit was his fault because as much as he wanted to say he grew and healed, he never did. All he did was lie and bring George down a dark road to satisfy his hidden self.

He really needed to go.

Dream lays down with his heart and mind racing in sync as he helplessly watched George, his light, fade slowly until it was nothing but a dead phone glow fading out. Dream felt tears prick at his eyes and he grabs his hair like he was pulling the thoughts out. He really liked George and he knew deep down that his love was genuine, but everything his parents said was fucking him up. He needed to go home and talk to them. He needed to *try* to make them accept him because that's all he wanted. Dream wanted his flesh-and-bone-self accepted. Not some...some fake presentable boyfriend or perfect son.

A whimper escapes his lips as he remembers Rose's hand on his face, Steven's casual pat on his shoulder, Erin's open chat on the stairs- things that were so normal in a family that Dream missed so much because he was exiled. Out cold in his parent's eyes. The tears don't stop rolling down his face as his lungs shrivel up from the lack of air in them, his whole body aching with a longing for an invisible acceptance, and he bites his hand.

"Dream?" George mumbles, eyes opening up a sliver. Dream's entire body freezes as his name sends pain through his body. "Are you okay?"

"No," he admits into the darkness with a steady voice. It surprised him a bit.

George was wide awake now as he scoots over to him. "Why? What's wrong?"

"I don't know."

Dream feels George's hand on his cheek, swiping at a tear, and he leans into George's touch, placing a hand over his, and he kisses the heel of George's hand.

“You are okay.” Those words are heroin. So good, but so, so bad for him.

“I am okay,” he says back and George wraps his skinny arms around him, pulling him close. A sob rips out of Dream’s chest and George holds him closer, hands clutching him like he meant the world, and he couldn’t make himself stop crying. His shoulders shook with broken, pained sobs and he clung to George, tears blooming a dark color on George’s shirt. It hurt so bad. Dream wanted this feeling out of him.

George kept holding him as the night stretches on. Guilt, regret, and confusion pile on his brain until his skull felt like it was about to shatter. He wanted answers. He wanted to be able to love George without making his boyfriend pay for it. He wanted to love himself.

You’re a liar, the swirl whispers to him. Dream felt like he was about to throw up and he took a shuddery inhale.

“I’m sorry,” Dream whispers. “I’m sorry, George.” *I have to go.*
George doesn’t say anything, but his arms wrap around him tighter.

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Hey, Clay, it’s your father...I was just calling to let you know that we love you and that we’re glad that you’re coming back to talk. We understand that Youtube is stressful and...and we know you lean to George for comfort. It’s a comfort thing for you to think that he loves you and that you love him to cope with the stress. Anyways, call us back to arrange times to pick you up from the airport and talk like adults about this. It’s a strange phase and your mother and I want to help you get... get unstuck. George isn’t good for you...so, yeah. Call us back. Thanks.

The message ends.

And George puts Dream’s stolen phone back on the nightstand.

Eighth Day

“George!” Dream laughs as he yanks him by the arms, dragging him into the park. “Slow down- what is your issue?!”

“Just come on!”

George wasn’t mad. At all. But was he annoyed that he had to go out of the way to find out why Dream had a meltdown in his arms? Absolutely. Stealing his boyfriend’s phone in the middle of the night *while* he was still holding a sleeping Dream wasn’t exactly a smooth move, but it did its job, and now George was doing everything in his power to convince Dream that everything was fine. So, when he heard about the walk-thru light show in the park, it seemed like the universe was on his side.

“Are you gonna tell me what we’re doing now?” Dream asks when they walk under the metal archway of the park. George gazes across the frozen pond to the litter of neon lights circling it.

“Take a wild guess.”

“I wanna say light show, but I’m having some doubts with the pond being right there,” Dream answers, gesturing to the frozen pond where their whole thing started.

George shakes his head at him. “You’re a genius, Dream. How could you have guessed?”

“It’s just my one million IQ.”

“Oh, yeah. That’s about as real as your speedrunning record.”

“You are so dumb! I hate you,” Dream chuckles. George shoves him and they start to walk under the trees wrapped with yellow and white lights. George wanted to talk to Dream about what happened last night and he wanted more than anything to try and take some of that pain away from all of this. Dealing with homophobia took a lot more than a quick dance to work through, so Rose’s dance therapy was out the window, leaving an emotionally dumb George to take control of the situation.

“Hey, George,” Dream says suddenly and he points to a light structure that was flashing an elf. “What color is that?”

George squints. “I dunno, yellow?”

“And what color is my hoodie?” Dream jogs up to the smiling elf and stands under it, a goofy grin on his face and neon lights lighting up every feature. George almost forgot that he was hurting underneath the smile.

“Yell- okay,” George sighs as he catches on, “that’s just mean. You’re mean.”

Dream laughs and wraps his arms around George, his chin digging into the top of his hair. “Come on now. Just jokin’ around.”

“Making fun of the colorblind, huh?”

“You walked into it.”

“Not really.”

“Oh, *please*, George!” Dream exclaims and they start to walk again, his arm draped around George’s shoulders. “We’re in a park full of colorful lights and you didn’t expect me to make *one* colorblind jab at you?”

George scoffs. “Now you’re just rubbing it in.”

“C’mon, it was a little funny. You were about to say yellow again.”

George doesn’t give in at first, keeping up his annoyed bit, but a smile cracks through, and Dream pokes his cheek. “There it is!” Dream said.

“Whatever,” George mutters. He was full-blown smiling at this point.

The lights themselves weren’t exciting to George. It was a bunch of bright bulbs that flashed different things every few seconds, the heat melting the snow beneath it to exposed dead grass, and it was getting way too cold to be outside. Dream, though, made it fun surprisingly. He would point out the hidden glowing raindeers behind dead bushes, poke fun at cheesy neon signs until George laughed, and he would warm George up by holding him close. George was truly amazed at his ability to shove everything he felt aside to make George happy.

It’s a comfort thing, Dream’s dad says in his head.

For you to think. Dream smiles down at him, his mouth moving. George couldn’t hear him. George watches him in a trance, his skin becoming too tight on his body.

That he loves you. Dream. Dream did love him. Right?

And that you love him. Even if he didn’t know Dream’s answer, he knew his.

“Can we talk?” George blurts, cutting Dream off from his ramble about the passing light Santa. His boyfriend’s smile falls quickly and so did George’s.

“Why?” Dream asks slowly. He’s suspicious.

“I kn- can we sit somewhere?”

Dream’s eyes flick around at the open park. “Where?”

George didn’t know any better than he did, so they ended up trekking through a snowy hill and back up to the side of the road just for a stupid bus stop bench on the outskirts of the park. Dream’s teeth were chattering and George’s sweatpants were soaked with melting snow.

“Are we almost there?” Dream prompts when a gust of winter wind stings their skin.

“I can see it.”

The dirty bus stop was a halo in the darkness as they sat down on the bench. They were subconsciously huddled against each other and George leaned into Dream’s shoulder, smelling pine and snow, as he started talking.

“I know you’re leaving, Dream.”

There was a beat of silence. “George, I’m sorry, I know you-”

“I’m not mad.”

“What?”

“I said,” George sits up so Dream can look at him, and George saw genuine fear in his eyes. “I’m not mad at you.”

“Look, if you really think going back to Florida is going to help you, then I won’t stop you. As much as *I* want to, it’s not me or my life. But I want you to be completely honest with me. What are they saying to you?”

“Bad things,” Dream whispers. He can see the wall come right up, so George grabs his hand. Not in a romantic way, though. He holds Dream’s hand because he needed comfort and he needed to be shown that he was safe with George. “They talk about you.”

“Do they?”

“They said that you’re using me...that all of this,” Dream gestures to himself, “was because you were manipulating me and you don’t love me. They said that you were awful.”

“Do you believe them?”

“Yes,” Dream says without a pause and George sucks in a pained breath. Dream doesn’t look at George. Beautiful glass eyes clouded as they look at the slush on the side of the road. He waits for Dream to explain or pull a *But, I realized they were assholes and stopped believing it!* c ard, and when he doesn’t, George feels his heart tear a little more.

“You know that’s not true, right?”

“I don’t know what to believe if I’m honest.”

“Why are you leaving, Dream? The real answer,” George says, “not some bullshit that you told my parents so they could print your ticket.”

“How’d you even find out?” Dream realizes.

“Does it matter?”

“Did you... *go through my phone?!* ” Dream yells and George sets his jaw.

“Fine, yeah, but that’s because I heard it ringing- again, may I add- in the middle of the night and I saw there was a message. So I listened.”

The anger leaves Dream’s eyes. “My dad’s message.”

“Yeah...”

“George, I have to leave. They’re pulling you into this mess and I don’t want you involved with them at all. If I go, they get what they want, and they stop harassing you, they stop calling. It all stops,” Dream explains.

“No way you actually think that,” George starts and he places a hand on Dream’s cheek to turn his face to look at him. “Dream, you think that going back to Florida will solve all of this? You think that giving in to their words and... I don’t know. I don’t know what to say!”

“I don’t wanna ruin your Christmas with this.”

George’s face falls in shock for a moment before an inappropriate giggle comes out of his mouth,

and he leans into Dream's chest as he starts to laugh. He didn't mean to laugh, but all of this was so weird to him and Dream couldn't have been more wrong.

"What? What so funny?"

George shoots up. "Because I never cared about Christmas. I didn't care about having one at all this year. You're not ruining anything."

"I ruined it for you last year, though?"

"Okay?" George shrugs. "That was last year and look where we are now! Sitting at a dirty bus stop and talking about your homophobic parents. Why did you ever think that this year was going to be perfect?"

His heart swells when Dream smiles a bit. "I dunno. I want to make up for the fact that I dragged you through Hell last year."

"With what? Cinnamon roll and tree decorating? Snow fights? Dream, you already made everything perfect just by showing up," George laughs and he feels a lump form in his throat. "Do you have any idea how fucking happy you make me?"

"I do and that's why I have to go. I can't drag you back into-"

"Dream. Dream, Dream, Dream, *Dream*. You're not dragging me into anything. I don't care about you making up for last year. I don't care about what your parents are saying about me," George lies because he was still hurting from Dream's agreement with their words. "If you leave, you're putting yourself through something you don't deserve. If you step foot into Florida before finishing out your stay here, you are proving to them that they are right about you and the Dream I know would never, *ever* give up a fight-" George snaps his fingers, "-just like that."

Dream's smile falls slightly. "George, I don't know if I even know the real me."

"A bit dark, but please elaborate."

"I like you. I really do. I can see myself with you for years and years and I can see you coming with me to Florida and waking up in the same bed as me, but," Dream says with a quick sigh, "How do I know that it's something I want and not something I'm making up in my head?"

George squints. "Why would you make something like that up?"

"Not sure. Maybe to try to justify our relationship."

Ouch, alright. "I don't...I don't think our relationship is the issue-"

"I mean, think about it, George. Have we ever explicitly said that you and I are dating?"

"...No."

"Fuck it; you haven't even said I love you back to me yet."

"Because I-"

"George. How do I know that I even wanted this? Maybe you're just a friend that I was conditioned into thinking you were something more because of that stupid act we did," Dream says, leaning back on the bench and staring up at the light. George's heart tears a bit more.

“Come on. You don’t mean that.”

“I don’t even know if you love me, George.”

George’s stomach turns as the heaviness of what was happening to Dream sets in, staring at a boy who looked exactly like him, only lost. “I don’t know what to say,” George says quietly. He didn’t. He didn’t, he didn’t, he didn’t. He screwed up.

“Just tell me this,” Dream murmurs, and he looks at George. “Tell me that whatever happens, I’m okay.”

“No.”

“What?”

“No,” George says stronger. He didn’t care if his ass was going to freeze to the bench; he was going to solve this. “We’re fixing this.”

“There’s nothing to fix. It’s over. I’m leaving on Christmas morning to hop on a plane and go to Florida. Then I’m going to talk to my parents, cry more, hopefully make them realize that they were wrong, and then we’re going to move on.”

“You’re just proving their point!” George cries. “Dream, please don’t go. *Please* .”

“I have no choice.”

“You do! Just tell me what you’re feeling and I can help you-”

“I don’t know what I feel, George, that’s the problem!” Dream yells at him and George reels back like he was slapped across the face.

Dream closes his eyes and his voice shakes as he says, “I never got better. I never overcame the homophobia and I don’t think I learned how to actually love you.”

There goes my heart, George thought. *Didn’t need it anyway.*

“Dream.”

“I’m sorry, George. I can’t be the ‘perfect boyfriend’ who has no issues and can give you unlimited amounts of sappy kisses and messages and-”

“Dream! I don’t want that. I want you.”

“Stop it.”

George doesn’t. “Don’t you realize how much of an idiot you are? I don’t care if I have to deal with homophobic parents or if another stupid holiday is ruined because I knew. I knew from the second you first kissed me that I would do anything for you. Let me help, Dream.”

“No, you fell in love with the guy who gave you the kiss.”

“I fell in love with *you* , Dream.”

The world goes silent as the words hang in the air, George’s heart pounding at the confession, and he sees Dream’s face soften a bit. “I love you, you idiot,” he says.

"I'm sorry I'm not good with words. But I want to say all the things and convince you that everything your parents are saying are lies and I can't, so all I can say is that I will always be here for you. I'll follow you, one-hundred percent. I'm sorry your parents didn't give you the same acceptance as my family and I'm sorry they managed to screw up your head into thinking that *you* weren't okay when you are. You want me to tell you that you're okay? Then prove to me that you are, Dream. Stop worrying about me for one goddamn second and let me help you for once."

George's cheeks burn as the wind blows against the tear running down his face. He can see Dream fight with himself on the inside, flicks of anger, sadness, guilt, and gratefulness cycling through his expression as they stare at each other.

"It hurts," Dream says almost silently. George lifts the hand he was still holding and he presses a long kiss on the back of Dream's hand.

"You're strong. You know that, right?"

"I don't know what to do. I really like you, but I can't let myself."

"You trying is enough."

Dream looks tired. George can see the dark circles under his eyes and the exhaustion seeping from his body as he continues to eye George- filled with guilt and sorrow. Yet, George could tell that Dream believed him this time.

"I can't make you stay, but Dream, I won't stop showing you that you are enough. I don't think you should go back."

"I don't want to," Dream finally admits.

"Stay with us." The light above flickers quickly and a crumbled piece of paper scrapes on the sidewalk in the silence.

"I want this feeling gone," Dream says. His voice was breaking. George pulls Dream to him, holding him securely to his body.

"I know, Clay," George whispers in his ear.

"I'm so tired of fighting. I want to love. I want to love you, George." George holds him tighter.

"I know. It's going to be okay." *Because I'm here. I'm here to help you.*

Dream wraps his arms around George like he was protecting him from an invisible bomb, and he can feel Dream's tears on his neck. George mutters something about a rat watching them and Dream half laughs half sobs against him. George closes his eyes and presses a kiss to Dream's ear.

"I love you, Dream."

Dream's fingers dig into his coat. "You're magic."

George throws his head back and laughs into the empty night. He still had so much he wanted to say and he wanted to suck every ounce of pain out of Dream, but he now saw that all he could do was show him that he was accepted. He would help Dream learn and he was going to help him heal every step of the way. No matter how long it took. Dream helped him feel wanted and worthy of loving, plus he did the whole fake boyfriend thing last year, and now it was George's turn to pay his debt back. He couldn't wait for the day when Dream said those three words back to him and

mean it.

A bus screeches into the stop, and neither moved as people darted in different directions around them. Dream and George were completely in their own world, in each other's arms, and the best part was that they could still see the flashing Christmas lights from their bench. Even hours later, still murmuring in each other's ears, George's light came back to him in Dream's eyes and that was when he felt one of his cracks start to heal.

Ninth Day

They lost power.

Losing power meant they lost heating.

All they had was a weak electric heater from George's college days and that was stationed smack dab in the middle of the living room, humming loudly as it struggled to warm up everyone in there. Rose was busy wrestling Mary into another sweater, Steven was prodding at a small fire in the fireplace, and Erin was sandwiched between George's aunt and uncle. But George and Dream? They were upstairs.

"Oh, you are evil!" Dream laughs as George presses dozens of goofy kisses on his face. His cold nose was jabbing into Dream's cheeks as George exaggerates the kissing noises even more, his icy hands still pressing on Dream's chest under his sweatshirt.

"I'm warming them up!" George responds. "You're like a personal heater."

"You are so weird!"

George giggles and lays his head down on Dream's shoulders. His room was dark from the storm outside, with fat snowflakes streaming down from the sky and covering their world with a fresh layer of snow. George has lived through multiple snowstorms, so when the power went out and took the heating with it, he wasn't too surprised to see his college heater pulled out. Dream, however, has barely seen a snowstorm. That meant that George had to show him the ropes on how to stay warm, and this was his idea.

"We should head back downstairs," Dream says.

"Yeah...we should."

Neither of them moved, though. George was half laying on Dream with their legs tangled together with his boyfriend's arms holding him to his chest, and the bed comforter was draped over them. They were layered in hoodies and pajama pants and they were just two human beings clinging on to whatever warmth they could get, which ended up being each other. That's what made him reach up under Dream's shirt to unfreeze the blood in his hands. It was fair though, since Dream had his cold hands against George's spine. George shivers as Dream drags a finger up and down his back.

"I mean, they'll be fine, right? They know where we are," Dream reasons. George nods against him, on the verge of sleep.

"No use in getting up."

Dream hums into his head. The wind howls outside and the house is quiet with no hum of electricity through the walls. They were both emotionally drained from the night before, not getting back home until late just as the first snowflakes of the storm fell, but Dream seemed a lot more open with George by talking. Not coherent talking that explained everything perfectly, but Dream would ramble to him randomly about his parents or Florida. George would sit a listen and let Dream mindlessly touch him, trying his best to make his boyfriend feel comfortable with where he is.

"And my sister found the biggest shark tooth I've ever seen," Dream says to a drowsy George, his fingers reflecting the size of the fossil. "I was so mad. I chased her all the way back to where my

parents were and I tried trading all my shells for it, but my mom ended up taking it and giving it to my dad.”

George gives a small laugh. Dream's hands play with a wrinkle in George's hoodie.

“He made it into a necklace for my sister and I to wear, and she ended up losing it since she was really young. Oh man, George, you should’ve been there to see what she did to make it up to me.”

“What’d she-”

“-she drew a tooth,” Dream says, “and slide it under my door with a piece of yarn taped to it.”

“Oh my God,” he giggles. “What’d you do?”

“I don’t remember, but I know I kept it somewhere.”

George remembers the salty air of Dream’s town from when he first went, and he missed the feeling of the warm sun on his skin as he and Dream spent days at the piers, wondering pointlessly. George’s heart slows into a heavenly calm when Dream draws repeated stars into his back.

“How’re feelin’?” George slurs when Dream pauses his rambling.

“I’m...fine. Right now, I guess,” he says. “I feel a bit weird, but having you here is helping a lot.”

“Hmph, are you sure it’s me and not the fact you gave my mom your phone?”

“...What’s the right answer in this?”

George lifts his head and smiles at him. “Knew it.”

“Okay, the phone thing helped a lot... *but* -” Dream shifts over George until he was above him, hoodie strings dangling in his face. “-it was your idea to begin with and you’re the only person that can make me feel like myself.”

“Oh, spare me. Don’t get all sappy on me, Dream!” George cries with an eye roll, but his heart was fluttering out of his chest. Dream beams at him. George was frozen like a deer in headlights and he twirls the strings around his fingers.

“I thought you liked sappy?”

“Yeah, but when you do it, it’s cringy.”

“Oh, come on now.”

“*Oh, come on now,*” George mocks in a cheesy American accent. “Why do you always say that?”

“It drives the boys wild; what can I say?” Dream mumbles as he lowers himself to grin on George’s neck.

“Shut up, Dream.”

“Why don’t you make me?”

A ripple of heat goes through his body and it makes his mind go blank, fingers gripping the hood of Dream’s sweatshirt tightly, and he sees colors he didn’t even know flash in his vision when Dream kisses under his jaw. Dream must’ve felt a whole new level of comfort with George after

last night and George was not complaining at all.

“See?” Dream whispers, sending more ripples through George. “I told you it makes the boys go wild.”

“Stop,” George giggles and he tries to wiggle out under Dream, pushing lamely at his broad shoulders. “Let me up! I’m serious.”

“Not to quote you again, but, no,” Dream responds. His works kisses down his neck until they reach the collar of his sweatshirt, where he gently bites skin, before moving back to look at a flushed George.

“I...hate you.”

Dream laughs. “Last night would beg to differ.”

“Dream! Stop! It!”

George’s boyfriend gives an evil laugh as he reaches behind his brown hair, working his blue hood up until it frames his face, and Dream kisses him. “You’re so annoying,” George mutters when Dream pulls away.

“Mhm.”

“Actually, I think you should go back to Florida,” George says.

“Too soon, Georgie.”

“Just for that, I’m personally driving you to the airport.”

“Good. Maybe you can amaze my parents into thinking liking boys is cool,” Dream jokes. George can see a flash of rawness in his eyes and he pulls Dream’s hood up this time, running a finger down his sharp jaw, and he pushes blonde hair off Dream’s forehead.

“No, I think you can do that.”

“What?”

“I mean...” George struggles to find the words. “I don’t know how you’re feeling now, but hopefully you’re not going to go back on anything. You know?”

Dream studies him for a second. “And leave you? Not a chance.”

George gives him a half-hearted smile.

He didn’t fully believe him.

“Look, I may be working through something, but leaving you all cold,” there’s a hand on George’s side, “and alone...” Dream leans down so their noses touch, “is the last thing on my list. If it’s even on a list at all.”

“You’re very confusing,” George admits.

“So are emotions. But I promise you, George, that it’s becoming clearer to me that I got you right.”

There’s a long pause of silence as George stares into his boyfriend’s light eyes. Dream’s touch felt

amazing against his hot skin even though George felt his insecurity pool in his gut, making his core colder than the freezing bedroom.

"I told you to stop being sappy," George says finally.

"You want me to cry again instead?"

"No! No, please don't cry-"

Dream laughs and fixes George's hood. "Relax. I'm kidding."

"Whatever. Let me know when you figure out what to feel."

"George!" His boyfriend exclaims in surprise.

"What?"

"Don't 'what' me! You are so...so..."

"Say it," George demands with narrow eyes.

"George. You are so George."

"Aw, thank you!" George deadpans.

"Wasn't a compliment."

George throws his head back in a loud groan while Dream wheezes, settling down on George's chest this time.

"I really hope you know that you do actually make me happy," Dream says. George didn't know what to say, so he stays silent. "I know things are messy with me right now and I'm sorry."

"You're not the one who needs to apologize," George said.

"Eh, still. It's like...when I'm with you, I know exactly what I want."

"Which is...?"

"You. C'mon, don't be an idiot," Dream says quietly. "I wish I could show you how much I like you."

"You can right now."

Dream glances up at him. "Yeah?"

"Kiss me."

Dream already had his lips there, brushing against George's and sending sparks down his throat, but George leans further back into his pillow. "No. Kiss me and don't hold anything back."

George didn't want filtered kisses anymore. He didn't want the ones that felt like Dream *had* to kiss him because he was there; he wanted a kiss that was purely from Dream's heart. George wanted to feel every piece of Dream's pain and swallowed love. He wasn't good with words, so George wanted to tell him through something he was good at: kissing.

And Dream did exactly that.

The kiss started gently at first like Dream was scared he was crossing lines already, but as George pulled at his hoodie string to tighten the hood, jokingly, Dream seemed to relax, and that's when George felt it. As Dream kisses him deeper and deeper, lips moving quickly to get all the silent words out, George feels the searing confusion. Dream's movements were desperate and hungry for George. They were also hesitant and slowed down at some points like he was going to pull away. George felt an overwhelming swirl of fierce love and sadness for Dream as he was kissed hard, being pressed further into the pillow beneath him. His entire body was on fire and his skin was very aware of Dream's hands touching his torso, neck, and face. It was fucking exhilarating. Like George was at the highest point of the rollercoaster and Dream was pushing him down it, making his heart pound and blood run fast in his body. Dream sighs and grabs a fist full of George's sweatshirt when he kisses Dream back, hands reaching under his hood for his blonde hair.

"Dream," George gasps and a quick tear slips out from the corner of his eye. "I get it."

He understood completely.

He knew exactly what Dream wanted.

Dream wanted acceptance.

George gives him that acceptance as he whispers an *I love you* between Dream's tongue. George accepted Dream for who he was and not what he was giving him. He accepted every part of Dream's past and he accepted all of his painful love and quirks. George loved him when he was laughing, crying, yelling, hurting, and healing. George wraps his arms around Dream's neck, his reindeer pajama bottoms clashing with the bright yellow of Dream's hoodie, and the colors blur together in his head. Love fills his body and he blooms under Dream like a rose.

Dream bites his bottom lip, and George knew he was the sun.

They don't break away for a while, except for the quick pauses to catch their breaths, but they always found each other again and told each other more and more things until Dream was kintsugi in his mind. A broken pot made whole again, gold filling his cracks, and made stronger than before.

"Hey, Uncle Steven finally got the backup generator- oh my *God!* " Erin says, pushing open George's door, and she slaps a hand over her eyes. "I'm sorry, oh my God, I'm so sorry..."

Dream cranes his neck to look at her, his hoodie strings slapping George in the face, and George can see red stain his boyfriend's cheeks.

"It's not what it...we weren't- George?" Dream says.

"What happened, Erin?" George groans, hands sliding down his face.

"It's just...your dad found the generator and got the power running again and I was supposed to tell you and I didn't realize you guys were making out I'm sorry I'm going now, goodbye," Erin explains in one breath and shuts the door again. Dream was still laying on top of George with arms on either side of George's shoulders, but when Erin's footsteps leave their door, he makes a pained noise and rolls off him.

"I hate Christmas."

"We're, like, cursed or something," George says. Dream makes another noise and George laughs at him, curling into his side. His body was still tingling and breathless from the kiss, but it was the best goddamn kiss of his entire life because it was Dream.

And Dream was finally finding himself.

Tenth Day

OhmyGodOhmyGodOhmyGod- Oh. My. God.

George fucked up completely.

His breathing came out in rapid pants as he half-walked but mainly jogged through the busy streets of London, miles away from home, with nothing but his wallet and house keys, and an almost dead phone. He was completely alone in a sea of people. The winter wind made his eyes water as he slides on black ice for a second, but he pushes on, weaving his way through people, and his whole chest hurt. He was a fucking idiot.

A massive. Idiot.

Dream was going to hate him after he found out.

George slows to a stop once he enters a plaza and got weird stares. He had a sharp pain in his side and temple from running, so he braces his hands against his knees as he tries not to throw up his McDonald's on the sidewalk. Leave it to George to ruin the Christmas Dream was trying so hard to fix. The storm had stopped overnight and left everyone scrambling out to the town for last-minute Christmas gifts...

...and so was George.

"Damn it," George mumbles as another sold-out sign appears in a shop window, hanging on a hoodie Dream said he liked. George turns and sees a store's lights flicker out, closing for the evening and leaving George in the dust. *Fuck.*

George was still walking further into the city as the sun dips behind the horizon and streetlights flicked on. Even though the night was coming and George spent practically all day gift hunting for Dream, people were still out and carrying heavy bags and boxes, making him look weird with his empty hands. George tucks them under his arms. He couldn't believe he got everyone an amazing gift this year and then completely forgot about Dream. His boyfriend. His own fucking boyfriend didn't have a Christmas present because George forgot that he never got around to ordering from Dream's Amazon Wish List. Even then, that didn't feel good enough for Dream. George went over the top this year with everyone and with Dream...well...

George whimpers as he picks up a cheesy card in a drug store. Dream was surprisingly hard to shop for since he never said what he wanted. Anytime George asked, Dream would laugh at him and say that he was the best gift of all. It was sweet- George snaps the card closed and shoves it back on the rack- but not the answer he was looking for. He woke up early for this shit too, getting on the metro first thing in the morning, with absolutely no plan. He didn't even tell Dream where he was going, and now he was going to get back late at night. He couldn't go back empty handed. Dream deserved better.

George pulls out his phone as he tucks his chin under his jacket and types ' *how to buy the entire world* ' into Google, getting nothing but terribly tacky gifts. *Fuck².*

Another text from Dream appears at the top of his screen.

???, it read.

George hesitates with a finger hovering over the message, but he sighs and swipes it out of sight

along with the growing pile of unread messages. He didn't answer before to build surprise, but now he's not answering out of guilt. Seven at night and nothing to give.

George walks in and out of open shops. However, everything open at this time was old people shops and not something a 21-year-old man would like—especially one who spent his time dedicated to speedrunning a video game and coding.

“Finding everything okay?” An older man says to him when George touches a glass elephant.

“Uh...yeah,” George says, “just fine, thank you.”

The man laughs. “You look worried.”

“‘Tis the season,” George jokes lamely. A deep laugh emerges from the frail man and he's taken back a bit. The man wore a tan sweater and had white muttonchops on his dark cheeks, smuggling a warm smile between them.

“What are you looking for, mate?”

“The perfect gift.”

“Let me guess...for the perfect person?”

George scoffs to himself. “Something like that.” Memories of Dream sobbing in his chest burns in his mind and he feels sick, so he turns his attention back on the old artifacts lining the wooden shelves. Dream wasn't perfect, and that was completely okay. Though, seeing Dream so shattered was kind of off-putting to George since he wasn't exactly used to seeing his boyfriend so vulnerable.

“As much as I want your money,” the man says and George feels a hand clap on his shoulder, “you're not going to find anything here. You're looking in the wrong place.”

George opens his mouth to respond but the man continues, saying, “Who are you even looking for? Are you looking for something that'll remind them of you? Or are you finding something that's *them*?”

“Obviously, I'm trying to find something that's him,” George responds. A quick beat of quiet follows and George bites his tongue at his sarcastic tone and the fact he outed himself completely to this stranger. Thankfully, the man's smile doesn't fade at the mention of Dream. Maybe he didn't pick up on it, or maybe he truly didn't care.

“Maybe an object is the wrong way to go.”

“...Isn't that the whole point of Christmas? To give?”

The man chuckles again. “If you're a child staring up at their parents, definitely. Think about it...” he trails off.

“George,” he finishes.

“Think about it, George,” the man continues, “it's Christmas and we all know we enjoy the gifts and money. At the end of the day, though, aren't you guys giving each other love?”

George gives him a side glance, slightly weirded out at how this man was talking philosophy at seven at night to a guy just trying to finishing shopping, but he nods politely.

“Love is a friendship caught on fire, George.”

George stares down at the glass animal clutched in his hand and he took a second to think about what exactly lead him to where he was now. It was all because of Dream. Their friendship kept them together, and their loyalty to one another drew them to England last year, Dream being a great friend and helping George out. And now George was using their deeply rooted friendship to help Dream. Their love spread like wildfire in their hearts and minds, but at the end of the day, when they lie next to each other, they were best friends. Underneath the scorching passion, there was cool rock solid friendship. They knew each other like the backs of their hands that were locked together.

He leaves the shop, thanking the man, with the glass animal tucked silently in his pocket. He knew he was heading home to put an end to his fruitless journey.

The bus skids to a stop in front of him and he boards an almost empty one, taking the furthest seat in the back, and he calls Dream.

“Hey,” he breathes.

“Where the hell are you?!” Dream yells. A man sitting a few rows in front of him gives him a quick look and George turns down his volume.

“In the city.”

“You’re in London?! What the hell, George! Why?”

“I...needed to do something real quick,”

“Real quick? George, you’ve been gone all day.”

George slams his head against the seat, watching the buildings whizz past him. “It was important.”

“Well, can you please come back home?”

There was something about Dream calling *his* house home that made something in George spark. He said it so casually like he's been referring to George's childhood house as his own home forever. Then he had an idea.

“I will,” George mutters to him, watching a hardware store go by. “Soon.”

“C’mon, George. Please,” Dream says in a strong but quiet tone. George rolls his eyes at his phone.

“Relax, I’m not going unhinged.”

“What about feral?”

George grins. “I’m not going feral either.”

“Whatever. I expect you back at nine, and any later, you’re on the couch tonight,” Dream jokes and George laughs. His insides were wiggling with fondness though, and he had to hide his embarrassed smile in his shoulder.

“You got it.”

“Be safe, you idiot.”

Dream hangs up on him, but George keeps the phone pressed into his ear, listening to the silence. He gets off at the next stop and walks in the opposite direction as he imagines himself with Dream—running into buildings for cover during England's rainy seasons, waking up in Dream's arms just as the sun rises, Cat stretching on their legs as they make fun of bad movies, long nights talking and gaming together, the smell of Dream slowly becoming permanent to George, and that amazing feeling of being able to touch Dream whenever he wanted. George walked into the store with the teeth of his key biting into his palm and he was able to give Dream what he needed officially.

George unhooks his apartment key from his keyring and presses it into the employee's dirty palm, watching the machine cut an identical one out as the machinery and his mind making the same noise.

A home.

He was going to give Dream a home for Christmas.

The hot new key was wrapped in a small yellow (green?) box that George hastily bought at the post office a few blocks away, and for a second, he almost didn't want to give it to Dream out of fear.

This is stupid, George thought to himself as he runs his fingertip around the lid of the box. *What am I doing? He has an apartment in Florida; he's not going to take this.* George stops walking and he looks back to the decreasing stores around him. He holds the box tighter in his grip.

He definitely won't like this. It's too soon. Way too sudden.

George takes an uncertain step in the direction of the hardware store to return the key. *I mean, he's just barely accepting things. But... it would save him from his parents.*

George takes a step towards the metro station.

But Florida's his home. He wouldn't want one here, too— another step to the store.

He loves me. He'll figure something out, George decides and he finally starts walking to the station, sliding the box into his coat pocket. George wasn't stupid. He knew exactly how much Dream loved him and he knew it would comfort Dream to know that he would always have a home with George, even if he chose to stay in Florida after Christmas.

He was tired as he shuffles his way back home. George closed his eyes and walked blindly down the street to his house, feeling the satisfying crunch of fresh snow under his shoes until his toe kicks the first step to his front door.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," Erin said from the living room when George closes the door, sliding down it slightly.

"Shut up, Erin."

George feels the box stabbing his side in his pocket and he silently slips it under the tree with a few others addressed to Dream, hiding it behind the trunk so that his would be opened last.

"Good Lord, Georgie," Rose comments. "You look bloody rough, don't you?"

"Where's Dream?"

"Upstairs."

George leaves without a word and walks into his room, not even caring that Dream was in the middle of pulling a shirt over his head, and he flops face first down on the bed with a loud groan. Dream laughs at him and flops next to him, mocking his groan weakly.

“Mm ‘ever goin’ gift shoppin’ ‘or you,” George mumbles into the mattress.

“What? What’d you say?”

“I’m never going gift shopping for you,” George repeats, turning his face to his boyfriend. Dream’s eyebrows quirk in slight surprise.

“That’s what you were doing?” He asks.

“Mhm.”

“All day?”

“Yup.”

“This better be the best gift ever then,” Dream teases and he plants a kiss on his forehead. Dream rolls off the bed and goes to head back downstairs, waving a dismissive hand over his head as he says, “You haven’t missed anything. Erin brought her girlfriend over and we watched *Elf* and made ugly sweaters.”

“I missed the ugly sweaters?!” George calls to him.

“I made you one, don’t worry!” Dream’s voice was faint as he went down the stairs and George buries his face again. Well, now he was going to worry. Dream has proven himself as the shittiest decorator in the house, making no promise of giving George an actually decent ugly sweater. He was expecting scratchy tinsel and hot glue bits all over the sleeves.

George suddenly lifts his head again. “Wait, Erin has a girlfriend?!”

Huh.

He was never leaving the house for the whole day again.

Night falls in the house and George takes his position against Dream’s chest, but he couldn’t sleep. He slowly and silently works his way out of Dream, tiptoeing down to the kitchen, and he sits at the counter with the open fridge blowing gentle air at him. A glass of apple juice was in his hands. His eyes felt sandy and his body ached to go to bed, but he couldn’t. His stomach was turning with the thought of how Dream would react to the spare apartment key and he thought he was crossing so many lines.

“He has a home in Florida,” he reminds himself. His voice echos in the dark kitchen, the dim fridge light casting everything in a gray. *He has no reason to move in with me.*

Ugh, but he did. Dream did. He would be so much better here with George.

He couldn’t tell if it was the thought of being able to kiss Dream whenever or it was the apple juice easing him, but George swayed back to the *maybe it’ll be fine* side. Dream said it himself that George made him happy...and George really liked the idea of taking trips to Florida with him, gazing out at the clouds together and falling asleep with those awkward neck pillows. It was endearing. Tempting. George’s heart longed to have something more serious, and he took a deep breath, reminded of the fact that Dream still had some healing to do.

“You’re up,” Dream says behind him. George turns to him, not bothering to hide his bummed expression. “What’s wrong?”

“Thinking.”

Dream scoffs and he takes a seat next to him. “When don’t you think?”

George looks at him. Dream’s blonde hair was ruffled in blonde spikes and sleep was still fogging his stunning eyes. *Love was a friendship on fire.*

“True,” George responds. “Any truers in the chat?”

“You’re not streaming, dumbass.”

“Oh, really? Couldn’t notice,” George deadpans, taking a quick sip of juice.

“You’re avoiding telling me what’s up.”

“Mm, no. I can’t say because it’ll ruin the surprise.”

George can feel Dream’s eyes on his face. “Get up.”

“What?”

“Get up.”

George slides out of his chair and Dream follows, guiding George to the front of the bright fridge with a hand at the base of his spine, and he puts both hands on his hips when they stop. His touch leaves a trail of butterflies tickling his skin.

“What are you doing, Clay?” George asks.

“Dance therapy, George.”

“Oh, God.”

“Just...trust.”

“There’s no music, though-” Dream starts humming to him, stopping George dead in his sentence.

He couldn’t recognize the song because he was too busy being hyper-aware of the sleepy raspiness in his throat, coming out like George’s crunchy footprints in fresh snow, and it was soothing. Notes rise and deepen in a random pattern and it works wonderfully like how waves at the beach sound, slowly fizzling out before a new note would come from his lips and send chilled goosebumps down George’s arms. Dream takes his hand, keeping one on his hip bone, and George automatically places his free hand on Dream’s shoulder. At first, they stumble a bit since they were a bit out of practice from last year. But as Dream keeps humming into George’s ear, they find a rhythm, and before George realizes what’s happening, he starts to talk.

Love is a friendship on fire, the man's voice says to him.

They dance and dance until the clock on the stove shows witching hour, muttering untold secrets into each other’s ears in the fridge’s glow. They talked as friends for the first time in a while. Neither of them realized how many things they missed and they start to catch up, rebuilding their base stronger until George could recite every detail in Dream’s speech, and Dream could tell what George was thinking exactly. By the time the sun finally rose, Dream and George were slouched

against each other in kitchen seats, the orange glow of the sun rivaling the brighter wildfire in their hearts.

Eleventh Day

Chapter Notes

song of the chapter:
snowman by sia

i chose this song because of two reasons: 1. its festive and very good. and 2. i saw an amazing edit of chasing snowflakes on twitter that used this song, and it stuck with me. check it out!! it's very cool and they did a wonderful job on it :)

link to the edit: <https://twitter.com/caranoblade/status/1339845349494558721?s=20>
@/caranoblade is the twitter user who made it :)

Being trapped in a car half an hour away from George's house wasn't the worst thing to happen to them, but it was definitely up there on the list. Granted, George's parents went out to get help, leaving them to literally chill in the dead car, but at least someone knew where they were. All that was left was to wait and hope the gas station wasn't closed.

George was sitting in the front passenger seat and Dream was in the back, long legs stretched out over the seats and arms across his chest, hoodie tied up around his face so only small locks of blonde hair stuck out. George was wrapped in a thin blanket since he was an idiot and decided a t-shirt wouldn't be bad for a quick trip to Erin's girlfriend's house to pick her up. It was a bad idea, though.

"Why were we dragged into this again?" George asks suddenly as he flips through old CDs that were tucked under the seat. He barely recognized the songs.

"Because," Dream mumbles, "we have to pick up your cousin's girlfriend and your parents thought bringing the other couple around would make her feel better."

George scoffs. "That's so stupid. Erin's brought boyfriend's around before."

"Isn't it her first girlfriend, though?"

"That we know of."

"I dunno, George. Maybe your parents don't want to repeat last year," Dream says. George twists around to look at him, raising an eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe they just want her to feel good right off the bat so that why they don't have to deal with the drama."

"Hm. True," George responds. He goes back to flipping through CDs but gets bored quickly, and starts reading all the fine print labeled on them. "How does she have this song already?"

"What song?"

"It's so basic for." The CD was blank and reflecting George's iridescent image. There was the name written in sharpie on the front in his mom's handwriting.

"Play it."

"The car's off, idiot."

"Well, search it on your phone then...dumbass," Dream one-ups. George glares at him and he reluctantly pulls up at the song. The beginning chimes of the piano start and Dream sits up from his leaned position, a lopsided grin spreading on his face. "No way," he says.

"I told you it was basic."

"It's Sia, George! Don't say that," Dream laughs. "It's a *classic*."

"It's *cheesy*."

"It's *festive*."

"It's *annoying*," George declares and he pauses the music just as the chorus of the song starts, but Dream taps it again, giving George a look.

"*'Let's go below zero and hide from the sun,'*" he sings lightly, "is a lyrical masterpiece. How do you hate this?"

"It's weird! She's like...in love with a snowman or something."

"That is not what it's about."

George scoffs. "Well, sorry I don't sit there and analyze songs like you, Dream."

"Good thing we have the time to make you," Dream says. They look out at the long road and then at the empty gas tank, and George sighs.

"You never let things go, do you?" He asks.

"Never. Now play it again and listen."

George slides the music time all the way back to zero and listens to the slow piano. He rolls her eyes as she starts to sing.

Don't cry, snowman, not in front of me...

George remembers the night when Dream broke in front of him. He sneaks a glance at his boyfriend, who became busy looking out the window, watching the winter world around them in the cold car.

A puddle of water can't hold me close baby...

George feels the ghost of Dream's hands on his skin, sending a quick flash of warmth to his core.

'Cause I'm Mrs. Snow, 'til death we'll be freezing...Yeah, you are my home, my home for all seasons ...

Seasons. The biting cold on George's face when Dream tackled him into the snow, the desperate need for warmth when their power died, even now- the car was turning into an icebox until they

could see wisps of breath in front of them. But there was also the sweat on Dream's collarbone in Florida when he visited and the beautiful spring saltwater they would stand in with their toes in the water, miles apart, and looking at the same ocean. The stunning fall leaves George would send in spontaneous letters when Dream mentioned Florida never got those colors. Every season they've been connected somehow. *I could show him all of it here*, George thought as he gazes at Dream. His home. Their home.

George starts to crawl back over the car's middle console, ducking weirdly to avoid hitting his head, and he lands on top of Dream's legs.

"What are you doing, weirdo?" Dream asks.

"Coming back here. What does it look like I'm doing?"

"Struggling."

"Shut up!"

Dream's face lights up in laughter and George pauses his climb to smile fondly at his boyfriend's wheezy laugh. "What?" Dream asked. "What are you looking at?"

"You. And your ugly face," George says. More laughter, so George continues with, "Is that why you haven't done a face reveal yet?"

"George!"

"Cause I can see why..."

"You're so dumb! I hate you," Dream chuckles. George shuffles his way up to Dream's legs and sits on his lap with his boney knees pressing against Dream's hips. His boyfriend's hands find his own and rest comfortably; fingers pressed gently into George's back.

"It's cold," George declares. The blanket wasn't doing much to keep heat in his body and he feels a quick shudder go down his spine.

"Oh really," Dream says dumbly. George stares down at him.

"...So you should give me your hoodie..." he pieces for Dream.

"Right, duh."

Dream wiggles out of his large hoodie and yanks it off of his head, pressing it to George's chest. Dream's eyes practically dig into George as he pulls it over his head, the large fabric creating a blob of green around him. George already feels warmer and he rolls up the sleeves slightly to keep them from covering his hands.

"How do I look?" George asks, running a hand to fix his hair.

Dream's eyes wander. "Pretty," he says quietly. George's stomach flutters and he takes his blanket, throwing it over their heads so it swallows them in darkness. George could barely make out Dream's sharp features in the sunlight coming through the thin material, but the rush of feeling his boyfriend's steady breathing did the job.

"Hi," Dream says.

"Hello."

Hands find his hips again. "How are you?"

"Eh, alright, I guess. I'm stuck in a car with an annoying guy, though," George says in a low voice. Dream chuckles.

"Annoying? That doesn't sound right," Dream whispers.

"You'll be surprised," George whispers back.

"Didn't he give you his jacket?"

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean anything."

"What about the fact he's staying here with you?"

George thought about the key. "He'll leave sometime. He always does."

"Not when he's locked in a car with you."

"Nah, I actually hope he does leave," George says, still whispering. Might as well go along with the bit to keep from overthinking. "He gave me a smelly hoodie."

"Is it really-" Dream leans into George's neck to smell. George feels goosebumps prick his arms. "Oh, you're such a liar."

"It's what I do."

"Well...what else do you do?" Hands travel up his back.

"A lot of things."

"Like?" Dream prompts. George could give a lot of answers right now.

But, he goes with: "I dunno. I code."

"Code?"

"You know, like computer commands?"

"How clever. What else?"

"...um...I..." George trails off, forgetting what he was going to say as Dream continues to touch him thoughtlessly.

"Do you kiss?"

Their eyes lock in the dark, the air becoming thick under the blanket. "I do."

"Does the guy stuck with you know how to kiss?"

"Yeah, but he sucks at it," George teases. Dream rolls his eyes and takes a slow breath in.

"You're an idiot."

George rolls his eyes back. "At least this idiot can kiss without wanting to cry."

A shocked yelp escapes from Dream's mouth and George presses his forehead into Dream's chest,

laughing at his own joke. “George! What the hell!”

“Sorry, I had to!”

“Rubbing it in, aren’t you?”

“I’m bored,” George admits with a shrug.

Dream smirks. “I know a few things we can do.”

“Like teach you how to kiss?” George deadpans.

"Please do."

George smiles and teases Dream by just brushing their lips, darting back anytime Dream tried to actually kiss him. The butterflies in his stomach pick up as Dream grabs his jaw, trying to line up their lips in the dark, and George presses a stiff kiss on Dream. His mouth in a straight line and he jabs their faces together.

"There, I kissed you."

“And moment ruined,” Dream groans and he tears the blanket fort down. George completely forgot about the song that was looping on his phone and when the barrier breaks, the lyrics strike George in the brain like a falling icicle.

I'll love you forever where we'll have some fun...

“See?” Dream says when he sees George staring at the phone. “I told you it was a lyrical masterpiece.”

George glances at him. *Will he love me forever?*

Dream looks right at him, expression surprisingly soft, and neither of them breaks eye contact. Both were too busy taking one another in, letting their minds wander into *What if...* and *When...* thoughts; however, they were too scared to even utter one out loud. The song’s final note fades and leaves a few beats of silence before the beginning starts again.

“Your dad told me something the other day,” Dream says finally. George breaks the eye contact and stares out the window at the frozen wonderland outside, still perched high on Dream’s lap with his boyfriend's hands digging into his bones.

“What’d he say?”

“He mentioned something about you calling your mom.”

George closes his eyes. “Oh.”

“He said that he didn’t want to say because it wasn’t his business to tell me,” Dream says slowly, watching George for any signal to shut up. “But you know...I thought it would be your business to.”

“It doesn’t matter now,” George responds. The jacket sleeves fall over his hands as he places them over Dream’s racing heart. George’s eyes trail down his boyfriend’s face to where his milky hands sat. *He’s scared.*

“Your parents won’t be back for a while. We’ve got time to talk.”

George shrugs. “Nothing to say.”

“Bullshit, George. And you know that,” Dream spits. George feels his heartbeat kick against his palm. “I’ve done my talking this holiday. It’s your turn.”

“Dream. It’s not-”

“It is important.”

“To you, but-”

“Tell me, George.”

“I don’t know what you’re-”

“Oh, come on, you know and don’t even-”

“I’m not good enough for you, okay?” George blurts. The shock that ripples on Dream’s face makes him screw his eyes shut and he tries to picture the world he memorized outside.

“What?” Dream says almost silently.

“When you would call me,” George says as he tries to keep his voice steady, “and say that you couldn’t do this anymore and that you weren’t sure about your sexuality. Do you remember those nights?”

“Y-yeah. Of course.”

“I kept wondering what I was doing to make you still think that. Then I thought about the things I wasn’t doing. Even then, when I tried and tried to convince you, and I finally had you back this week, I’m still. Not. Good enough. I just can’t help but wonder why I can’t make you think otherwise.”

“I don’t get it-”

“I told you it was dumb,” George says. He opens his eyes and the snow was bright to look at, but he wasn’t crying, which was good.

Dream places a hand on his cheek to force George to look at him. “No. No, it’s not. I had no idea that I was...I was...”

“Making me feel that way. I know.”

Silence sat between them. *Don't cry, snowman, don't you fear the sun...*

George remembers how Dream was the sun rising above him when they kissed in George’s bed. Was George scared of Dream? Was he scared that he was going to melt under Dream until he was a puddle of water? Of nothingness to him?

“I didn’t know, George,” Dream says. “If you told me, I would’ve worded so many things differently-”

“It’s fine. If I told you, you would’ve just lied to me and that would’ve made things worse for you. Plus, I know you didn’t mean it.”

Dream’s expression softens. “No, I didn’t. I may struggle with a lot of things, and I know I said

that I couldn't do it, but I didn't mean us, George. I never meant I couldn't do us."

"What else could you have meant?" George scoffs.

"My parents."

Oh. "Oh."

"Long before I told them about us, I had this... anxiety following me. Like they knew. Everything they said felt backhanded and they were trying to slip to me that they knew, and it was driving me crazy. I was calling you those nights when the anxiety was way too much for me because I knew hearing your voice and talking to you would help. It did, all of those times. I didn't mean to make you think that you weren't doing enough. You are, though, George. You did and are doing so much for me without even realizing." George didn't know what to say, so he stays silent, feeling Dream's heartbeat slow a bit. "I wasn't supposed to come here."

George's head snaps up. "But you said..." he trails off because he didn't want to put more words into Dream's mouth.

"I know what I said. It was completely last minute, though. I came out to my parents a few weeks ago, and my plan was to tough it through the holidays to prove to everyone that I wasn't a pussy. But then, as Christmas started coming, they took down my stocking. They stopped inviting me to see my extended family. They told me that I was messed up and that they wanted me out."

"Dream, oh my God," George breathes. Dream shrugs like it was normal, and George felt like he was going to throw up because it's not. It shouldn't be normal for that to happen.

"So I went to you. Well, your mom. I told her what happened and she said that I was more than welcome, and two days later, I was on your front porch with nowhere to go but in," Dream explains. George swallows as he bends over to touch their foreheads together. "And George? I am so glad I did."

No, he thought to himself. *I don't have to be scared of the sun.*

"I'm sorry I made you feel like that," Dream says. George stares at him until Dream's eyes become a giant one in his vision.

"It's okay," George says and he meant it. It was a simple misunderstanding. Dream also strengthened George's hope of giving him a home here. With him. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"It's not okay, but their silence is nice," Dream jokes. Rose still had Dream's phone lying at the top of the fridge, shut off completely, with a sticky note filled with bad words on it.

My snowman and me, Sia sings. George presses a gentle kiss on Dream's nose.

"*I want you to know that I'm never leaving*," Dream sings in a low voice to George. He knew his thoughts. It took George everything to keep his bubble of laughter in as Dream starts to mock-sing the song, giving certain lyrics some meaning by softening his tone, but otherwise, they start to goof off. George lays on Dream's chest as they belt out the chorus in weird voices, and it didn't take long for them to switch over to Mariah Carey, singing in the empty car even louder than before. Time flew by as they held their mini-karaoke session. They started to put on random songs that were completely inappropriate for the season and force each other to sing them. In fact, they were still singing to each other as Rose and Steven come back and fill the gas tank silently, smiling at the boys inside.

“Steven, I just might think they’re in love,” Rose says almost sarcastically. She knew the look of love anywhere, though.

“I think you’re right,” Steven says and he watches Dream’s face light up as his son explodes out a muffled cracked note. “You’re absolutely right.”

Twelfth Day

“George!”

“Oh, Dream!”

“Go away, George!”

George laughs gleefully as the back of his fingers just barely snag the back of Dream’s shirt, but Dream’s awkward hobble always made his moves unpredictable, and he jerked right suddenly, moving out of reach again. His muscles hurt from the exercise, but he refused to give up.

“Dream! Come back here!”

The day of Christmas Eve was perfect. It wasn’t freezing like it has been for the past few days, but it wasn’t warm enough to ruin the winter spirit swirling around the frozen pond. Everyone was happy, including Dream. The war with his parents and his mind stilled to calmness as the blades of their skates slice against the ice, sending frozen shavings in their wake. He was slowly getting the hang of ice skating, and all it took was to be hunted down by his boyfriend. He wasn’t as fluid as George, though. Far from it, actually. But he managed to do excusable pushes for skating with a few slips here and there, but George was always right there to pick him back up. Just like always.

“You had your excuse last year!” George shouts behind him. Dream watches as George glides in front of him with, like, no effort, and Dream rolls his eyes. *Show off.*

“I still can’t skate, idiot! It’s unfair-”

“Oh, boohoo,” George says. He turns seamlessly and skates backward, a cocky smile on his face as he watches Dream’s shaky legs carry him at a walking pace. It was embarrassing, but a hell of a lot better than last year. “C’m on, Mr. Miami! I tagged you fair and square. It’s your turn.”

“You didn’t even touch me?”

That was the wrong thing to say because George digs his skates into the ice as Dream slowly slides to a wobbly stop. The two watch each other in a daring stare off.

“Don’t. You fucking. Dare. George.”

His boyfriend gives an empty smile. Dream knew damn well he was going to dare.

“George. C’m on, now.”

George gives a small push as he circles him like a shark, each circle getting smaller and smaller until Dream could feel George’s body heat from where he was standing.

“I’m not doing this,” Dream says to him. George’s face would suddenly appear in front of him and then disappear as he kept circling.

“I’ll give you a head start.”

“That really won’t do anything. Might as well just have me skate to the other side and then go.”

George snorts. “‘Skate.’ If you wanna call it that.”

“Shut up.”

“Ten.”

“George, seriously. I’m not doing this.”

“Nine.”

Dream’s heart picks up a bit. “You’re not actually-”

“Eight.”

George stops in front of him, hands in pockets, and a blue scarf wrapped around the lower half of his face, leaving his playful eyes looking at Dream. “Seven,” George says.

That was enough lost time to make Dream start waddling on the ice with his arms out. It was hard to find the muscle memory to make himself glide and his panic was absolutely not helping, but having George- a skinny 24 year-old man who barely left the house- *catch* him...that was not happening. He needed a plan to keep from being tagged.

George’s family was scattered across the ice in their own world since they knew that they had nothing to be scared of if George was targeting Dream. Uncle Ben and Aunt Lily were doing a mock salsa in the center of the pond, Rose and Steven were skating lazily around the edge of the pond with their hands locked, and Erin and her girlfriend, Lizzy, weren’t even on the ice. They were sitting on the bench and laughing at Dream’s stupid attempt to escape. Dream glares at them and Erin waves.

“Oy, you’ll get ‘em next time, Dream!” She yells at him. Lizzy nudges Erin, but Dream saw her laughing too, so he flipped them both off quickly.

“Dream!” George’s crazy laughter comes from behind him and his legs desperately try to move faster, remembering to keep the blades angled out slightly, and he sucks in a breath before pushing. It was a weak glide, but he was further away from George, and that’s what mattered.

“Leave me alone!” Dream calls over his shoulder. He grabs onto his slipping beanie and the sudden change of balance throws him off, rocking from side to side, and then a goddamn miracle happens on the frozen pond. In a cocktail of adrenaline and the human desire to stay warm in the cold, Dream keeps moving and things all click together.

Dream squares his shoulders and his balance returns, and then he’s flying. His legs work on instinct to keep him moving as he skates right into the plumes of his own breathing. The winter wind made tears stream out of the corners of his eyes, but he didn’t stop. He couldn’t. All of the pent up energy and frustration at *everything* exploded from his feet and he pushed harder and harder, loving the sound of the ice being scraped underneath him. He felt free. Like he was finally outrunning the demon that was following him and he lifts his chin to the sky, opening his mouth just like George taught him, and snowflakes sprinkle down into his mouth as he flies. His cheeks ache from grinning and the wind bites at his exposed face in the best way possible. Dream felt everything.

He felt the good and bad slowly blend in his heart until he felt the amazing rush of acceptance for himself. *Himself*. He had a family that couldn’t accept him, but Dream finally felt closure as he opens his green eyes to George, who was standing a few yards in front of him with a small smile. He felt that closure because he had a family here. He had George.

“...I promise you that whoever told you otherwise is wrong. And if they won't love you, there are

seven people back at the house who will. You will feel so much better."

When Steven first said that to Dream back in the library, he didn't understand what he meant. He knew that these seven people accepted him, but he didn't think much of it. Until now, at least. He whizzes by a skeleton tree standing tall and he locks on to George. He understood what Steven meant. He did feel a lot better finally letting himself accept George's family's love, loving the warm environment around him. He loved Rose's hand on his cheek at the tree farm, Erin's brutally honest jokes about him, Steven's openness to talk, Uncle Ben and Aunt Lily's casualness with him...God, he loved this family. Of course, he still loved his own deep down, but Dream had to do what was best for him at the end of the day. Even if it was hard to let go, but he was ready.

He feels light as George's small frame becomes closer, head spinning with the euphoric rush of happiness. There was one more thing he had to accept before he could let himself look at the scars in his mind.

George's love.

They collide into each other, and Dream wraps his arms around George like he was the last person on planet earth. They fall onto the ice with a painful thud and slide a few feet, Dream's face buried into George's cheek. They don't say anything for a second while Dream catches his breath, breathing softly into his boyfriend. George smelled like fire and cookies.

"Ow..." George finally groans out. Dream laughs through a watery grin because he was going to cry again—this time from pure delight. The thick ice was no match for their combined body heat as they laid there, George wrapping skinny arms around Dream as he snuffles.

"What is your issue?" George asks, but there was an underline of worry.

"Nothing," Dream responds. He hugs George tighter and he doesn't want to let go. "Absolutely nothing."

And he meant it.

"O...kay," George says slowly. "I saw you skating."

"I was going so fast, holy shit."

George laughs. "No way, I could probably go faster."

"Okay, well, I doubt that."

"Are you challenging the pro?"

Dream wipes a tear on his right cheek. "The pro is Erin, George. Don't get ahead of yourself."

"Oh my God," George sighs. "Get up you're crushing me."

"Are you boys okay?!" Rose exclaims as she stands above them, her head blocking the sun, and giving her a halo. "Quite the fall you took, Dream."

"On my son, nevertheless," Steven adds.

Hands are held out to them and Dream finally lets George go, taking their hands for help. Steven hauls Dream off of George as Rose helps her son up, and he gives him a clap on the back to get the shaved ice off his hoodie.

“Shake it off, Clay,” Steven says. “Falls happen.”

“Yeah. They do,” he says and he watches Steven return to Rose, retaking her hand, and they return to their own world- looping around and around with each other, never letting go. *I want that*, he decides. *I want that with George*.

However, since it’s George, he wasn’t going to get that exactly.

“Race you to the other side?” George challenges, skating to his side.

“Prepare to have your ass handed to you.”

“You’re a bad skater. I’m not worried.”

“Oh, am I now?” Dream says, raising an eyebrow at his boyfriend. George shakes his head and pretends to crouch down for more power.

“When I say ‘go,’ we go.”

“Okay, that’s a bit unfair. I don’t know when you’re gonna say-”

“Go!” George yells suddenly and he shoves Dream out of his way, taking off in a stream of blue in the white world, and it takes Dream a minute to get going. He finds that familiar stroke of the skates, and he’s right on George’s tail in no time. When they reach the pond’s shore, the front of their skates dig into the ice and create deep grooves in it. Just like scars, the grooves wouldn’t go away- at least not for a while. But as Dream looked out to the rest of the ice, seeing everyone else carve them, he decided that they were oddly beautiful. Everyone else accepted the scars on him and on the ice, and now it was his turn to.

“I won!” George shrieks with a loud clap of his hands.

“What?! No, you didn’t- I was, like, five feet ahead of you!” Dream whips his head from the vast ice to George, his face is pink and glowing from skating.

“You were not! I was waiting here for years for you to hurry up!”

“Oh, come on, *years*? ”

“Yes! You were so slow.”

“You’re so dumb.”

“Whatever. I proved my point that you,” George jams a finger into his chest, “are a terrible skater.”

“Give me lessons sometime then,” Dream says, grabbing the side of George’s arms. He wanted to kiss him.

George tilts his head. “I’ll do them for ten dollars an hour.”

“What?! George-”

“Fine. Five dollars an hour. I’ll give you a discount.”

“I’m not paying you to give me lessons.”

“What about two dollars?”

“No!”

“Come on, Dreamie. You’re getting the best teacher in the world for two dollars,” George tries to bargain. During their gamble, their faces became dangerously close and Dream loved danger.

“I’ll give you a dollar for every hour you teach me how to skate.”

“Ugh, no way. That’s too low,” George scoffs.

“But two dollars wasn’t?”

“Well, it would be double of what you’re offering.”

“George. If you teach me how to skate for ten hours, you’re getting ten dollars.”

“Could be twenty with the two dollar rate.”

“You are so annoying.”

“You love me,” George retorts and Dream finds his cold lips. His hand cups George’s chin, and he pulls him to his chest so their hearts pound against each other in sync. George brings a hand to his cheek and presses his body against Dream, sending electrifying lightning bolts through him, and jumpstarting the nerves in his body. Dream opens his eyes when George stops kissing him. George had his eyes closed and he kept their lips still brushing. Instead, they stood and breathed in each other with their hearts racing, an unfamiliar, warm, syrupy swirl chasing the poisonous one out of Dream. He watches in a trance as snowflakes fall on George’s brown hair and flushed face.

I do love you. He felt the genuine, friendship-on-fire love for George.

“Hey,” Dream says, nudging George a bit. “Wanna catch snowflakes?”

George’s beautiful eyes meet his and the world stops spinning around Dream. “Yeah. I do.”

So the two crane their necks to the gray England sky and open their mouths. Dream feels the refreshing taste of melting snow in his mouth and George safe in his arms. Cool snow hits his burning face as he says:

“I love you, George.”

George doesn’t say anything because he didn’t have to. Dream knew George loved him just as much as he did. He feels their skates bump against each other and he knew he would do this every year for as long as their fire burned.

They stopped eating snowflakes when their jaws started locking up and Dream holds George’s hand as they skate around. George ended up starting his Very Important ice skating lessons, grabbing Dream’s hands and pulling him on the ice in wide circles and careless zig-zags, making lame and overcritical comments on Dream’s form until their laughter mingled in the crisp air.

“I’m going to miss you,” George says quietly as they skate over to where everyone was gathering. “You know, when you leave to go back to Florida.”

Dream hesitates. He forgot about his plane ticket. “I...I don’t know if I wanna go anymore.”

George looks at him.

Dream takes a deep breath.

“I mean, might as well finish out the holiday, right? They want me home, but I don’t want to be there.” Dream takes his hand and squeezes it. “Not yet, at least.”

Something comes down in George’s eyes and a new, heart-stopping warmth comes in them as he beams at Dream. “Cool,” is all that he says.

Dream touches their noses together. “Definitely. And how could I miss that?”

They look over to where the twins played in the snowbank, pelting Erin and Lizzy with snow in a mini-war. The girls were getting absolutely destroyed and Dream laughs at them.

“Hey, Erin! You’ll get ‘em next time!” He mocks. She glares at him with messy blonde hair and a snowball gets thrown into the side of her face. Dream and George laugh harder, bracing against each other until two snowballs hit them in their shoulders.

“Well, come on now, boys!” Rose says, tossing a perfect ball in the air. “If you can talk, you can certainly fight, right?”

“Mum!” George cries. She throws snow at her son’s forehead and Dream starts to laugh at him. A snowball to his face stops him short.

“That includes you, Dream,” Steven points. George and Dream exchange evil smiles. They both make the same plan in their heads because they were best friends and always knew what they were thinking.

As Dream packs snow into balls and directs George on where to throw, handing the ammo to hurl it at his family, a whole war breaks out between everyone. Even Uncle Ben and Aunt Lily get dragged in and ally with George and Dream, dominating the snowy field with snowball bombs.

Dream doesn’t remember when they stop, but he remembers walking home with George leaning into him, not caring that people walking by were staring at them. Or maybe they were staring at the snow and ice-covered family with skates over their shoulders. Who knew and who cared? Dream was finally happy to show off George tucked under his arm.

When they finally step inside the front door, all shivering with snow in their clothes, Dream asks Rose for his phone.

“Are you sure?” Rose says.

“Yeah. I can do it.”

Then Pandora’s box is pressed into his palm and he deleted every single message and missed phone call notification on his phone, not bothering to read or listen to anything they had to say. He deletes everything except for his sister’s messages, and he calls her with George placing a curious chin on his bicep.

“Hey, Anna.”

“Clay,” she says. “Where are you?”

“With George...my boyfriend.” Dream look over to George who was radiating with proudness. It was a small step to admit that he was with his boyfriend, but it made a huge difference in how weightless he felt.

“Are you okay?” She asks.

“Yeah,” Dream responds slightly shocked. His parents never asked him that. “I’m sorry I won’t be home for Christmas.”

“It’s okay, Clay. You know I don’t care, though, right?” Anna says, lowering her voice like she was telling a secret. “I think it’s cool that you have a British boyfriend. Is England as pretty as it looks?”

“It is very pretty. Really cold, but pretty, for sure.”

“Man, I’m so jealous. All the British boys are good-looking, aren’t they?” She groans and Dream laughs, feeling his heart swell. At least someone in his own family accepted him.

“Yeah. Yeah, they are.” Dream looks at George.

“This is so unfair. When can we...sorry, *I* meet him? Does he look like Harry Styles?”

“Eh, soon, maybe. And no, he looks a little worse than that,” Dream says. George’s head turns to him.

“What? What is she saying? What are *you* saying?” George asks and Dream holds up his hand, reaching the phone above his head when George tries to grab for it.

“I miss you, Clay. Grandma and Grandpa say hi.”

“Tell you what: I’ll fly us both out here sometime. Maybe for the summer, I dunno. And you and I can go look at all the cute British boys.”

Anna laughs just as George goes, “Dream! What are you talking about? Why is she laughing?”

“That’ll be fun. Hopefully, mom and dad would be okay with that.”

“Forget them. They’re just mad they can’t come to London.”

They talk for a few more minutes and Dream feels so much better hearing his sister’s voice and how open she was talking about boys and visiting. He was almost sad to hear her go. He really liked feeling a tie to his Florida family and now he knew that he would always have one, even if she was still in her parent's hands. Dream was proud of her for thinking for herself. He couldn't wait for her to meet George and have both of his family meet.

Speaking of family visits...

He pops the plane ticket for tomorrow out of his phone case and sits in front of the burning fireplace in the living room. George joins him and the two watch the flames lick the air, images of them from last year and this year dancing in the orange glow. Dream leans down and gives George a quick kiss before he rips the ticket in half, throwing it into the hungry fire.

“You are okay,” George whispers to him as the paper burns into gray ash. The heat tickles Dream's face as he leans against George, holding his hands, and he finally feels his heart pound freely in his ribs. He was finally free to love.

“I am. I am okay.”

Thirteenth Day (Bonus Chapter)

Chapter Notes

happy holidays!! here's my present to you guys :) I hope you enjoy

Christmas Day brought a warm glow to everyone's eyes and hearts as they sat around the tree and passed out gifts, laughter and stories swelling to the roof until it felt like it was going to burst. Sure, George and Dream were a little tired from waking up before the sun (thanks to the twins), but that didn't stop them from cracking jokes at the gag gifts.

"Are you serious?!" Dream cries as he pulls out a tiny rainbow flag from his stocking. George completely loses it and has to leave the room. When he comes back, he looks at the pride flag clutched in Dream's embarrassed face, and he has to leave again.

"From us," Uncle Ben says from the couch behind him, "to you."

Dream tucks the flag in the scarf George's mom made him and put it with the rest of his things. Everything felt natural. Fluid. Like the white water rapids in his life gave out into a lake, and now he was just cruising along, chatting with everyone, and not even realizing when George slipped behind the tree and tucked a green box in his pocket. How could he see that? The fire was blazing, sugar cookies were turning golden in the oven, and when George did come back, he snuggled right up against his side. So, yeah. He didn't see some things-sue him.

But that doesn't mean he didn't ask. "What'd you do?"

"Oh, I just saw an empty box behind the tree and threw it away," George says as he sends out a holiday tweet. It was a believable lie, and Dream dropped it, handing his present to George.

"What is it?" George asks as he turns the long box in his hands.

"Open it and find out, idiot."

George tears open the shiny red paper and the metallic gleam of letters stare up at him. The red paper is quickly ripped off and the lid of the box is long gone with it.

"You got me..." George says slowly, "a repeat gift from last year..."

He holds up the white glasses and George's family all exchange looks. Thank God Dream told them what the glasses were beforehand, or this would've been *really* embarrassing.

"No, no, I didn't. Put them on," Dream says and he gently takes them from his boyfriend's soft hands, lining them up with his brown eyes. George pushes his hands away.

"Dream, they're clearly the same glasses from last year-"

"George."

"What?" He looks kind of hurt.

Dream smiles at him. "Put them on. Trust me, you'll see."

George watches him carefully and then his hands slip from Dream's, holding completely still with his eyes shut. Dream slips the glasses over his face until they cover his eyes and look stupidly big on his small face.

"Okay, open them."

"Mm, I'm scared," George responds. "I feel like I know what these are."

"Well, you've done it before. All that's different is the..." Dream gestures to the glasses frame, "...exterior, I guess. It's okay."

"Don't be a pussy, George," Erin cuts in. George turns his head in her direction and Dream chuckles when he sees that his eyes are still closed.

"Come on, Georgie! Dream's dying with anticipation next to you," Rose says. George's blind gaze returns to him, looking down slightly, and Dream tilts his chin up so their eyes would meet when George stops being a chicken. He wanted to be the first thing George sees.

"When I say 'go,' you open your eyes, okay?" Dream says gently. George's lips press in a thin line, but he nods. Dream waits a few seconds to be annoying and to keep everyone on edge, and then he says, "Go."

A breath gets knocked out of George as he stares at Dream, jaw slacking slightly. He can feel George's eyes all over him- bouncing from his eyes, to his chapped lips, to his bright green hoodie, the fire behind him, and then right back to his eyes. George places both hands on the sides of Dream's face and he pulls him in.

"You! You're green!" George cries and Dream laughs, making George's hands smush his face together. "No! Don't do that!" George's hands tear away from his face.

"Why?!" Dream chuckles.

"That makes your eyes shut- stop laughing at me!"

"You are so cute!"

"Look at me again," George demands. Dream manages to relax his laugh a bit so his eyes weren't scrunched up, and he looks at George with love radiating out of every pore in his body. George's fingers flutter around on his green hoodie to touch all the wrinkles in it. His look never leaves Dream.

"Your eyes are so green," George whispers breathlessly. "Like, I knew they were green before, but they're actually *green* green."

"Say green one more time for me," Dream jokes. A small giggle erupts around the room.

"Green."

George doesn't take the glasses off for a while as Dream keeps quizzing him on the colors around the room, pointing to ornaments, paintings- even the patterned wrapping paper laying around them. George always wanted Dream to keep looking at him, though, so he could keep seeing his eyes. His voice was so fond and excited that Dream gave in every single time. Plus, he really didn't mind looking at George. He was...pretty. Very pretty.

“Alright!” Steven booms suddenly, making Dream jump a bit. “Is it that time, lads?!”

“Oh man,” Erin groans.

“Oh, yes!” Steven responds to his niece, pointing a charming finger at her. “Go grab the sweaters, won’t you?”

“I won’t,” Erin responded in a monotone. She turns back to her new pair of ice skates and works on lacing them. Steven’s face drops a bit, and he gives Uncle Ben a hopeful nod.

“I don’t want to,” Uncle Ben says as he stands. “But I guess I will.”

“That’s the spirit!”

Dream gives George a curious look. “What? What’s happening?”

“Family pictures,” George says. He pulls the white glasses from his eyes and blinks at the sudden change. “We forgot last year’s photo, so now we’re making it up this year. But we have to take them in-”

“-Homemade sweaters!” Rose sings. A large box thuds down on the coffee table in the center of the room, and Dream saw the ugly sweaters that they made a few days ago- tucked neatly inside.

“That’s what they were for?!” Dream says.

“Duh. Every year my mum buys ugly sweater kits, and we wear them in family photos,” George explains. Everyone was hesitant to grab theirs.

“I thought we were just making them...for fun...”

George laughs. “Nope. What you make is what you wear-” George starts to rummage for theirs, “-and that’s why, every year, I’ve always tried to make mine look decent.”

George tugs his sweater free, and Dream places a hand over his mouth to keep from laughing. Since Dream didn’t know what the sweaters were for and he was mad at George for leaving him alone that day, he made it his job to make the *ugliest* sweater imaginable for his boyfriend, and holy fuck, he forgot how bad it was. There was a choppy cut red box in the chest's center with bells hot glued around it. White tinsel hung from the collar unevenly, and there were random pom-poms dotted across the front. A shitty recreation of Rudolph sprawled on the back of the blue sweater and there were terribly drawn snowflakes all over it. At the very bottom, on the back, there were two stick figures holding hands with a large snowflake between them.

“Dream! What the hell is this?” George shouts when he sees them.

“It’s...it’s us cha-Ha! I’m sorry,” Dream laughs. “It’s us chasing snowflakes.”

“I actually hate you. Dream- I have to *wear* this! In the photo!”

“Yup.”

“And you’re laughing!”

“I am.”

“Alright, let’s see yours then-” George grumbles and he pulls out the green sweater next. Of course, Dream’s was better. It was a deep green with red tinsel around his wrists with a Santa face

made out of pom-poms on the back. On the front, right across his chest, was a large smiley face he drew in black sharpie. Bells littered the sweater, so anytime his muscles twitched, he would ring loudly. It was still ugly, but better than what George's was.

"You realize my mom's going to post this, right?" George turns to him, the sweaters in his arms. Dream's laughter dies in his throat as he gawks at his boyfriend.

"No way, what? Are you serious?"

"Yeah. But what's the matter, Dream? It was so funny before, right?"

His sweater is thrown in his face. "Okay, that was *before* I knew that your mom was going to post it."

Before George could respond, they're rushed into the downstairs bathroom and they take their time changing into the ugly sweaters. Dream cringes when the tinsel scratches his neck, and the hot glue from the bells make his arms too stiff to move, but it was worth the pain to see George stare emptily at himself in the mirror. *Mission accomplished*, Dream thought. Ugly sweaters were the move to make George shut up.

They tug and scratch at them as they walk to the living room. George was muttering light-hearted insults at Dream as they watched Steven line up the tripod, directing George's family where to stand. When it was George's turn, he leaves Dream standing uncomfortably by the fireplace. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be in the photo. It felt weird, especially since Dream was invading their holiday traditions.

"Beautiful! Everyone hold it-" Steven says and he clicks the timer, rushing to take place next to Rose. Dream feels a pang of sadness in his stomach as the camera slowly beeps down to zero.

"Well, what are you doing, Clay?" Rose exclaims and she waves him in. "C'mon! There's room."

Dream stares at the gap behind Erin.

"Would you just get in here?!" Erin cries as the beeping picks up. Dream grins and he rushes into the space, throwing an arm around George in the middle of everyone, and he presses their cheeks together in the cheesiest grin he could manage. There's a quick flash and everyone relaxes their posture. George rolls his eyes as he regains his balance from being tugged down, love dripping from his words as he says:

"You're so dramatic."

Dream throws his head back in a laugh, George's quick peck at his jaw tickling him, and Steven shows them the camera. "I say it came out great! The best one yet," Steven says.

George takes the camera gingerly and they stare at themselves on the screen, matching merry smiles and hideous sweaters. Everyone around them looked at them with easy grins, except for Erin- who was nothing but a pink blur in front of them because he accidentally shoved her in his scramble. George and Dream's heads bow together as they point to her, making quips and jabs until Erin, herself, was laughing with them. The oven in the kitchen beeps and the smell of fresh cookies fills their souls.

The day goes by in a whirl after that. Dream remembers chasing George out in the snow over something and catching him halfway down the street, wrapping him in a bear hug and peppering his boyfriend's hot face in a million kisses in the middle of his neighborhood. It was so nice to not care about who saw or what they were going to say, even though Dream would still feel the loom

of paranoia over his shoulder. But George- he was always there to reassure Dream that he was in the right and things were okay. Dream holds George to him, barely hearing what he's saying, and he caresses his porcelain cheek in the falling snow. The town bells chime in the distance, and they can hear chatter from houses around them, chimneys blowing smoke into the blue sky, and Dream kisses George with everything in him.

When he opens his eyes, he's standing in the kitchen, and the sky is dark. Everyone was upstairs and they were alone in front of the sink. This, he doesn't remember it fully. He doesn't remember why George was sitting on the counter, pulling Dream in with a wet towel, hungry kisses devouring his heart and mind as George wraps his legs around his waist. He remembers heat shooting from his stomach to his heart and making it flutter in his chest as he holds George's face still so he could kiss him better. But, he doesn't remember what lead to this and he certainly didn't remember what happened before George's hands went to the hem of his ugly sweater, but he does remember pulling away not long after his fingertips brush against his ribs.

"Hey," Dream whispers. George's lips were red and raw from being bitten. *Beautiful*. "Not right now, 'kay?"

George nods as Dream presses a much gentler kiss on his lips before pulling away. His hands were wet and soapy. What? Why were they wet and soapy?

Oh, right. Dream looks down at the sink filled with dishes.

They were supposed to be doing those. Not each other.

Dream takes a shuddery breath as he pulls away and he focuses on scrubbing the spaghetti stained dishes clean, handing them to George, who stayed up on the counter and rubbed them dry with the towel.

"Did you like what you got this year?" Dream asks, breaking the heavy silence. George nods and places a dish on the rack. "...What was your favorite?"

"Favorite...what?"

"Gift."

"Oh," George says. *He's distracted*. "Um- I dunno. I liked the glasses. They were very appropriate for me."

Dream offers him a slight laugh. "Yeah! When I found out I could customize the frames- it was like...perfect."

"Oh, definitely."

More silence before Dream drops the strainer in the sink and turns to him. "Okay, what's up?"

"What?"

"You were fine all day, and now you're quiet," Dream points out. George blinks at him. Dream lowers his voice. "Are you upset that we can't-"

"No! No, no, no! That's not it," George rushes to say, waving his hands with a red face.

"So, it is something then?"

"It's always something, isn't it?" George sighs.

Dream's eyes soften. "But *what?*"

He can see George think for a second before his entire body sags.

"Did you even realize that you never opened a gift from me?"

Dream, who had gone back to washing, stopped. He tries to remember the headcount of all the things he's gotten today and which ones were tagged with whose name, and sure enough, he never got something from George. "I guess not."

"I had something for you."

"Yeah?"

"But, I backed out last minute."

"Come on, it couldn't have been that bad--"

"Not bad," George says. "Bold."

"Bold?" Dream prompts. They look at each other and George studies his face before hopping down the from the counter.

"Bold." He repeated, and he leaves. Dream stands there at the sink for a minute, staring at the damp towel that replaced George on the counter, until he hears soft footsteps behind him again. There's a soft poke of a box in his shoulder blade. When he turns, a green box is shoved in his hands.

"Open it. I'll explain when you do."

He notes Georges's shaky hands, and he slowly unties the soft red ribbon. Dream opens the box, and the ribbon falls to the tiled floor in shock as his heart pounds in his ears, his own hands beginning to tremble as he stares down at a silver key. Sweat pricks at his eyebrow and he feels sick in the best way possible.

"I know that Florida is your home," George starts, "but I want you to know that...that you'll have a home here. Always. With me." Dream can hear George physically swallow his nerves.

"George..." Dream breathes out.

"I'm not asking you to move in if you don't want to. My gift to you is to give you a home here in England with us- *me*, " George corrects. "You don't have to take it. It can be more of a symbolic thing, I guess. And I know it's a lot considering you're finally getting over all of that stuff, but I really think you would like it here--"

Before George could finish, Dream slams into him and pulls him into a hug, silent tears filling his eyes, and takes the key out of George's box and grips it in his palm until it hurts him. He was never going to lose this key because he was never, *ever* going to lose George.

"I don't even know what to say," Dream mutters as he pulls away. George's eyes were bright with his own tears and he tries to wipe them away lowkey by rubbing them.

"It's dumb, I know. It's a key to my apartment because I didn't know what to give you and I feel like it was still too much--"

“No! No, George, it’s perfect. I love it.”

“You do?” George looks up at him through his dark eyelashes. Dream cups his cheek and presses his face into his.

“One-hundred percent, Georgie.”

“Oh, thank *God* , I thought you were going to freak out or something!”

“I mean, I am! On the inside. A lot,” Dream admits and he holds the key to the light. “All I wanted was a solid home to go back to, and as much as I love the physical proof,” Dream pauses and he places it back in the box, “I don’t think I needed the key to see that.”

“Don’t go all Socrates on me, please. It’s like nine at night-”

“Because you were always my home, George.”

“Oh my God,” George groans, but Dream sees the pink dust on his cheeks.

“You were always something- some *one* - I could go back to and feel safe with. So, thank you for solidifying that metaphor,” Dream teases. George lets out another loud, painful groan and Dream laughs, officially declaring (to himself, of course) that this was the best fucking Christmas ever. He has redeemed himself from his shitty behavior from last year. *Finally*.

They finish washing the dishes, soft trumpets playing from the battery radio perching on the windowsill above the sink, and it takes them an ungodly amount of time to. They kept getting distracted by stealing kisses, splashing dirty water on each other, and Dream was messing with George by holding dishes way above his head. *Chores are way more fun like this*, Dream thought as George climbed up on the counter on his knees to grab the plate. His green eyes dart to the key sitting on the counter and he smiles. Maybe, just maybe, he would do a lot more chores with him in the future.

As night fell and Christmas day came to a close, Dream and George lay in each other’s arms as they talked about when Dream could visit and when Anna, now called ‘Drista’ to George, could fly over and meet him. Granted, the thought of seeing his parents again still made Dream feel anxious, but he had the key now. The key that hung proudly on his keychain in his suitcase, ready to be used whenever he wanted. George eventually drifts off half-way through a sentence and Dream rests his chin on his boyfriend’s soft brown hair, pulling him closer to his heart until he swore he felt George’s palm nestle right on top of it.

Soon, he thought days later as he waved goodbye to everyone at the airport. George had brought his glasses with him so he could see Dream’s green one more time. Dream watched London shrink beneath him and dissolve into the ocean’s blue water.

Soon, he decided as his parents screamed at him, weeks later. The key burns a hole in his pocket and he kept his chin high as he talked to his parents, telling them that they’re wrong and he walks away without looking back. Well, he did look back once. That was when Anna came running out to the front lawn where his car was, wrapping arms around him and placing a shark tooth necklace into his hand where the key was. Dream hugs her back and begs her to call him. But for now, he had somewhere he needed to go.

Soon, he breathed as he crams everything he could in a suitcase after boxing up all of his stuff. He drives to the post office and slams boxes down with a hidden grin, watching his things disappear to his new home.

Soon, he believed when a plane ticket is handed to him.

Now, he recognizes as George runs into his arms two months later. The time was now and his shark tooth necklace hung from his neck as he bent over to pick up his shipped boxes, George holding his apartment door wide open for him. A gray cat comes running to his feet and rubs against his legs, welcoming him with more warmth than he could've asked for. He's been there for two minutes, and love was already filling every corner. It was different than George's childhood house, but George was here, making every strange thing familiar.

"You found the necklace," George says that night, fingertips dragging down the thread to the black tooth over his collarbone.

"Drista did. Turns out she never lost it-she just didn't want me to have it," Dream explains. George smiles against him, saying something about siblings as Dream grabs his waist. George pulls the covers over their heads as moonlight spills silver into the room, hushed breaths lifting in the silence.

When Dream wakes up the next morning, in his home, George was in his rightful spot in his arms. His white glasses sat right next to Dream's phone, where Anna's contact photo lights up at him. Dream, moving carefully so he wouldn't wake George up, answers.

"Where are you right now?" She asks, a smile lighting up her words. Dream looks down at his boyfriend- his light, home, and *love* - and he kisses his bare shoulder.

"I'm at home."

End Notes

obviously, any work dream or george find weird or uncomfortable will be taken down.
respect their friendship first!!

since it's counting down the days: *****work will be updated daily until
Christmas***** :) happy holidays friends!!

****excuse any typos or grammar!!***

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